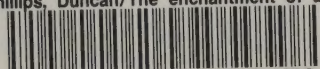


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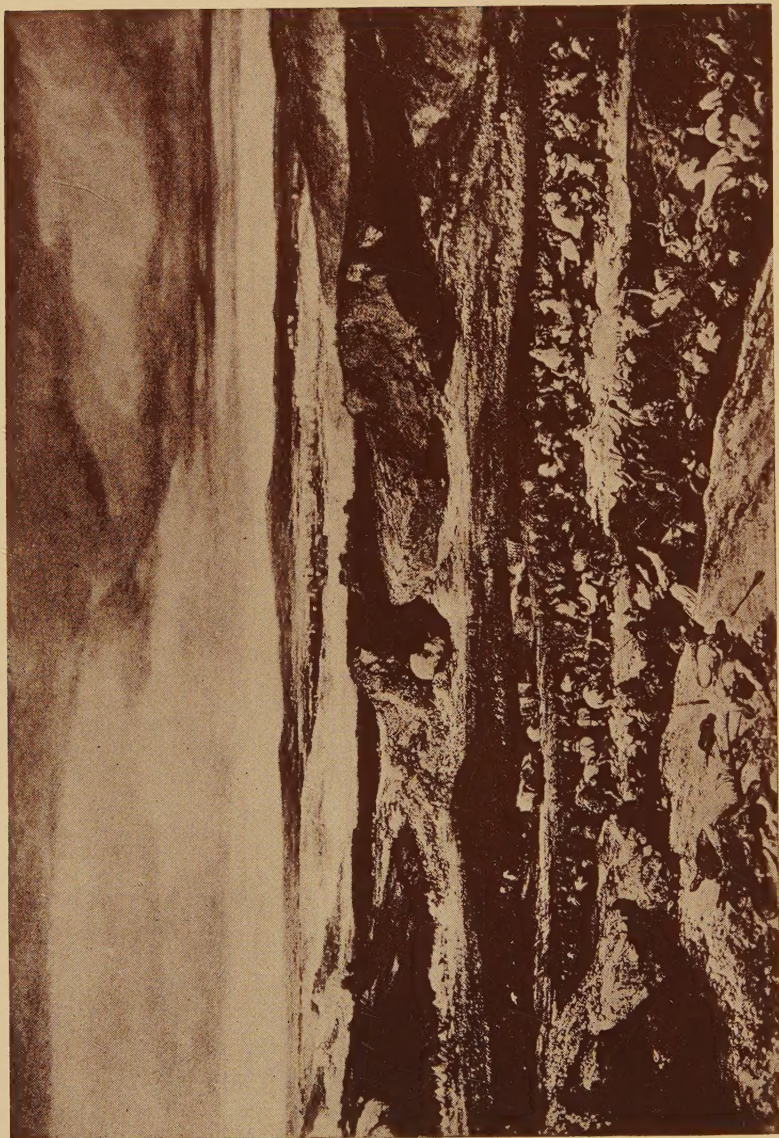


THE ENCHANTMENT OF ART









THE DEFEAT OF THE CIMBRI  
*By Décamps*

THE  
ENCHANTMENT OF ART

*As Part of the Enchantment of Experience  
Fifteen Years Later*

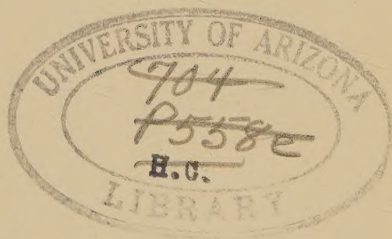
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BY  
DUNCAN PHILLIPS

WITH  
NEW ESSAYS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO  
MY MOTHER

122994



*This is the crown and triumph of the artist,  
not merely to convince but to enchant.*

R. L. STEVENSON





## NOTE

THE author thanks the Editors of *The International Studio*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *The Yale Review*, and *Art and Progress*, for their permission to reprint the essays which first appeared in their pages.





## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THIS is a book of frankly personal appreciations. Apparently it is about art. Actually it is about my own life, some of its fine moments when the enjoyment of artistic beauty made it wonderfully well worth while. Art is a personal matter from beginning to end, from the personal mood that precedes an original creation to the last word of personal opinion passed in comment upon it. Perhaps no act of mind is more personal than criticism. And this is especially true when art is concerned, for no subject is more controversial.

Some art books are historical. Others are technical. This one only claims to be personal — and persuasive. Without apologies for recommending my own tastes and opinions I have sought to bring other men and women to my way of thinking, about truth and beauty, about life and art. Briefly, the purpose of this book is the purpose of art itself; to stimulate the appreciation of life and to intensify the joy of living. If I have written chiefly about painting and books, and only English books at that, it is because I had to draw the line somewhere. But the Enchantment of Art is a subject as big as life and as enduring.

DUNCAN PHILLIPS

NEW YORK, 1914



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## BOOK I

*We're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see.  
Art was given for that.*

ROBERT BROWNING, "FRA LIPPO LIPPI"

# THE ENCHANTMENT OF ART

## I

### FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

#### INTRODUCING THE SECOND EDITION

AS I turn back to the essays of *The Enchantment of Art*, written from twelve to fifteen years ago, I am embarrassed by some of the premature judgments of my youth and envious of its genuine ecstasy. The book seems to me to-day the work of another person, and because of my curious sense of detachment I can and I must write about it with the sympathy and with the divergence of opinion which I would impose upon the confidences of a young friend. To be sure, this is a record of beauty which I myself lived through and at a most impressionable period. All the world was young for me because I was young. Art was a wonderland wherein I could expand my own experience. That charming essayist, Edgar Sill, once wrote that "the aspiration for more and ever more *life* is man's one permanent and paramount desire. To be alive in every faculty, to have the greatest possible total of conscious being, in physical, intellectual, and emotional fervour, how and where is there to be found a perpetual source of this power and activity to

supplement the limitations of our circumscribed existence save in the expressed power and activity of other human spirits? And that of course is art." It was, at any rate, to this aspect of art that I was enthralled when I wrote my story of enchantment. Art was the more excellent world of truth and meaning within the outer world of facts. At the threshold of this realm of spiritual significance I stood expectant and exultant. In Italy I wandered as under a spell which cast over my studies and appreciations the glow of a rather irresponsible but altogether delightful state of mind. This joyous mood I would gladly regain if only to compose once more with that "first, fine, careless rapture" which comes spontaneously only to those who seek adventures of the mind in the delectable country of youth. With disarming innocence I discovered for myself what was, I suppose, quite generally known. At any rate, I had to set it down, to tell of my discoveries, even as poets tell of their by no means unusual affairs of the heart. The mistakes of judgment which I made were after all no greater, considering the abandon of the outpouring, than the mistakes I make to-day. To be sure, I liked extravagantly a few painters and writers whom I now consider mediocre and I did scant justice to other painters and writers who now seem to me great artists. Many of the ideas I was then eager to oppose I am now no less eager to uphold. Post-impressionism had upset my newly acquired and profoundly cherished standards of value, and I was not yet mentally prepared to make room for both subtlety and extreme



simplification, for both veiled and glamorous content on the one hand and austere intellectual structure on the other. Rhythm I loved and I practiced it in my prose, but to me it was a bounding pulse from the heart of everything, and I did not understand that it must be valued also as a logic — a mechanism, or more accurately as a functioning and instantaneous animation of parts, as the *means*, in fact, to produce the very emotions which had stirred me to the depths.

I no longer hold that "Impressionism is the function of all true pictorial art" — not even in the broad sense in which I used the term throughout this book. It seems that I was strangely agitated, fifteen years ago, because the modern French painters of atmospheric colour and changing lights, of the passing show and of the passing moment, had appropriated the sobriquet as a description of their special innovation, whereas I was apparently embattled for the idea that impressionism means all potentially æsthetic sensibility, and all responsiveness to creative impulse. To be more specific, I wished to call attention to that unity of effect in the mind, or at least that rapt focusing of attention which the impulse of art can give to our broken, scattered, and imperfectly comprehended æsthetic thrills and imaginings. I was right to the extent that there is not, and that there well might be, one big word to define the elementary function which the sensitive artist shares with the imaginative child and the wholly sentient "man in the street" when all three encounter the experience of being suddenly transfixed with an idea or a mental picture so that they must

## 6 THE ENCHANTMENT OF ART

put it down in some enduring form before the distracting pressure of life pushes it out of their consciousness. What I meant by impressionism is true to a greater extent of what is now called expressionism. In other words, the urge to unburden oneself of beauty applies less to the sensations themselves than to arbitrary and unrepresentative concepts based on the sensations. However, I wasted my time disputing the established monopoly of the word Impressionist by artists who specialized in one chosen aspect of life closely observed — who were interested in the local, the particular, the evanescent. The revolt against all this has set in, and is now at its zenith. To reflect an effect in nature is regarded as a questionable practice unless one's reflection partakes of a childlike fantasy as in Pierre Bonnard. If I had known the work of Bonnard when I wrote *The Enchantment of Art*, I would have responded to his appeal as to no other modern artist, for his is precisely the spirit of mingled impressionism and expressionism — of the miracle of truth and the romance of personal vision, which prompted me to a book in praise of mingled conviction and enchantment. In reprinting so tentative a work I can only plead as an excuse the feeling I now have that I was groping in the dark for a very important switchboard which might flood the consciousness of almost anyone with illumination about the essence of art. I offer the book now, not at all as a piece of work consistently in the realm of æsthetics (I have a book of that kind smouldering at the back of my mind), even less as a contribution to criticism or to art history,

but as a youthful exercise in expressive sensibility — with sensuous reactions to effects in art corresponding to the painter's reactions to effects in nature — with a joy in finding nature in pictures analogous in kind with the painter's when he finds pictures in nature. I warn you, therefore, whosoever reads this book, not to expect much scholarly information, and technical teaching. I give you only a very personal document woven of delights and dreams into a harmonious fabric. And I hope you may find in it some heart-warming stimulation to the enjoyment of what artists have enjoyed in their first glow of imaginative conception. The emphasis is always on the source of art in life. The analysis is always of the effect on uninitiated minds rather than of the cause found in professional methods. The re-creation of the artist's impulse by the impressionistic critic may be very different from what the artist himself intended, but at least it is made out of the same dream-stuff and admits us into the same sanctuary of creative sensibility. Who could be exacting with a young appreciator's exuberant zest?

In spite of the fact that in these later days I plead for tolerance and the ventilation of the mind to all the winds that blow, yet I do not hesitate to republish these essays even though they are not entirely free from prejudice. To the charge of inconsistency I plead guilty, but it does not trouble my conscience. Consistency from youth to middle age is at best a stiff-necked virtue. Let me be tolerant then even of my own early intolerance, trusting that I may persist

in this faith so that when I am sixty I may look back without too much confusion on what I am now writing at forty. However loosely constructed my early essays, and however weak the link between its two parts, and its commentary on two arts, yet the book somehow hangs together by reason of its imaginative and philosophical threads woven into a consistent pattern. Nor would I alter a line of the pages in which beauty and the relation of art to nature are candidly considered. They seem to me, from this middle milepost, immature yet essentially sound, and even fairly reliable as guides. And the faults of the volume proceed logically from its chief merit, its whole-hearted enthusiasm for the artistic life. With all its faults, therefore, I comply at last with the many urgent requests which have come to me for a second printing. What I have pruned away are the more conspicuous blemishes of careless thinking, ill-considered judgments, verbiage, and redundancies. In their place I have added one or two sober second thoughts, with the dates marking these revisions of opinion; also several critical papers hitherto unpublished except in magazines, including an analysis of the mind and art of George Moore, who wrote the finest literary impressionism, and an appreciation of Maurice Prendergast, which, although a comparatively recent piece of work, belongs with my essays on romantic comedy. The dates which I have appended to each chapter tell the tale of a book which harvests the thoughts of a good many years. It has been my idea in this way to suggest the gradual unfolding of critical

faculties. From a desire merely to communicate to others my own special and limited enjoyments I have in due time graduated to a sharpened consciousness of the need for understanding the artist's methods, and the even greater need for an open door of the mind to many different kinds of æsthetic expression.



## II

### THE IMPRESSIONISTIC POINT OF VIEW

(1911 — APPROVED AND ANNOTATED 1926)

I love all beauteous things,  
I seek and adore them;  
God hath made no better praise,  
And man in his hasty days,  
Is honoured for them.

I too will something make,  
And joy in the making;  
Although to-morrow it seem  
Like the empty words of a dream  
Remembered on waking.

ROBERT BRIDGES

ART, I suppose, is all very well for those who like it," concedes the scoffing materialist, "but what is the use and what is the excuse for art criticism? What do you mean, to begin with, by the words art and beauty?"

Well, let us be humble about language and consider what we do mean by these words art and beauty. Even in the haziest of our human conceptions art is associated with the idea of beauty, and beauty is a word we use to acknowledge those pleasures in our lives, pleasures partly sensuous, partly spiritual, which have lifted us, in a sort of ardour of appreciation, out of our self-centred habits of thought. *Beauty, then, is a special kind of pleasure or ecstasy which stirs and grows within us when, through contemplation of nature or experience with the products of life, we live more intensely outside of ourselves. But art we*

*know is more than mere beauty in the abstract. Art implies, not necessarily the seeing of beautiful things, nor even the making of beautiful things, but the seeing or making of things beautifully; in other words, in a way to enlarge our experience and to sharpen and intensify our perceptions.* However, much work that is beautifully done is not art but skilled labour. The beauty that is given to a work of art means much more than mere creation, however successful, for a creation only becomes a work of art when it represents a genuine emotion on the part of its creator and is so conceived and so expressed as to communicate that genuine emotion to others. The craftsman turns out a beautifully made chair in accordance with a given pattern, but the thing has been done, no matter with what emotion of joy, for the sake of the thing rather than for the sake of its beauty. It is a good job, but no more a work of art than the novel or play or picture that is made in the same purposeful and utilitarian way. Of course, if beauty were a fixed object that could be known and explored and described like a mountain, then we could all be artists. If there were such a thing as absolute beauty, it would be our duty to search for it until we found it so that we could apply it as a test to all and rest our minds from vague surmise and tentative theorizing. But frankly, beauty cannot be reduced to any given formula, nor can it possibly be defined in words. It is not a matter of facts at all, but of concrete emotional perceptions often produced by sheer physical sensations. In dreams we are at times conscious of a strange glamour that seems wholly un-

related to our experience, a veritable chaos of jumbled thoughts, colourful visions, forgotten images of the past, unspoken hopes and fears for the future, all in a setting that is the wildest of creative imagination. Of such personal and fantastically insubstantial dream-stuff is the mystery of life and its offspring, *the mystery of beauty, the mystery of what moves us spiritually in material things*. We can no more make all people appreciate the same beauty than we can make all people dream the same dream. Beauty is as vague and various and variable as human personality itself. *Emphatically, then, we cannot lay down laws for art, which is the human being's method for focussing and developing its perceptual sensibilities and for expressing its sense or conception of beauty, its detached and disinterested ecstasy*. But we can and should formulate rules for assisting us in the practice of the innumerable kinds of artistic expression demanded by the innumerable kinds of human mind and taste. And one truth at least is true for all people and at all periods. Art, to *be* art, must be sincere, and the expression not merely of sense, or sight, or sound, but, back of all that, the expression of the individual soul.

"But," shrilly protests the scoffer once again, "granted the artist, why the art critic?" Because the critic represents not only perception but appreciation, without which there would be no art. First of all there must be perception of that abundant beauty "in the rough," which, in our large way, we call by such names as reality and nature. The child sees beauty about him and loves it, although he does not

know it for what it is. That is the stage of pure perception. Sooner or later to receptive souls appreciation comes, like a miraculous awakening to a life of new sensations. On the horizon of some lives this æsthetic radiance never dawns, and they are left in darkness, bereft of one of the richest joys of existence. To others a mysterious power is granted to express their sense of beauty, to become artists. The majority of us are more truly artists in feeling what we cannot express, than hosts of expert craftsmen who glibly express what they do not feel. Feeling is the soul of art. Technique is only its bodily functioning. It is, therefore, the appreciation of life which results in the expression of art, and to help us enrich our lives by the cultivation of our tastes and æsthetic faculties, that is the exalted purpose of all art criticism.

The *appreciation of life*, is not that worth while? — not life in the abstract, but our *own* lives, our *own* experiences, our *own* moods and emotions. Stirred with very real reverence we are constantly exclaiming one to another — how wonderful is our world! Few are the scientists, few also the moralists, who fail to impress upon us our insignificance in the stupendous scheme of things. Of what avail are our petty strivings after this and that, our feverish desire for we scarcely know what. Every poet has urged us to come out into the night where stars that are changeless and serene preside over the mysteries of the dark. How all our vain philosophies are shamed beneath those stars! And how helpless is our knowledge and impotent our power while the storm god has his way

with us and the chill wind of death blows wheresoever it wills! Truly it is fitting that before Nature's god we should worship and bow down. But suppose that we carry this reverence to its logical conclusion. Suppose we say one to another — how wonderful we are, you and I! How wonderful that we have eyes to see the beauty of the stars, and ears to hear the terror of the storm, and souls which at the blowing of the wind of death are wafted all invisible into the dark beyond! Suppose we dwell upon our common merits as men, and our supreme fitness to inhabit and inherit the earth. Suppose, even suppose we admire our peculiar merits as individuals, the particular combination of opinions and beliefs, aspirations and passions, tricks of speech and habits of thought, which, distinguishing us for better or worse from any other mortals that ever lived, bear witness to the inscrutable miracle of personality. By all means let us burn incense before all the shrines of nature, but in so doing remember that we are but fulfilling one of the thousand impulses of our imperious being; that we do not exist for nature, but nature for us, to give us something plastic to mould to our dream and to our desire.

The purpose of life, then, is the expression of self. In order to truly live, it is needful to freely give one's life, without pretense and without too much reserve. Doubtless the noblest expression of self is self-sacrifice. As for art, it is but one of the many channels for personal expression. Its function is to discover and celebrate beauty and truth, treasures that are supposed to abound on every highway and byway. But



is it not now a truism that these treasures exist not without but within — within the seeing eye, the informing mind, and the mystical inner life of our sacred sensibilities? From the favoured few consecrated to art, offerings of beauty and truth are prized by the world in proportion to the amount of personal taste with which they have expressed their sense of beauty and of personal wisdom with which they have been enabled to grasp and give forth truth. Individuality has been, and will, we believe, continue to be, the criterion for success in modern art. There is no statute book of truth, no positive definition of beauty. Both terms are relative, things of our own conception and of our own making. Unless we find in art personal testimonies and individual conceptions, beauty and truth may be stated with all copiousness and care, but to no greater effect than the repetition of the names we give to them. Unless we derive the benefit of sharing the personal vision of an exceptionally sensitive or original pair of artist-eyes, we much prefer to do without art and see the world for ourselves. And so we demand that art shall be the more or less adequately accomplished record of personal impressions. Otherwise the ablest craftsmanship that the schools can teach must be of little avail. And so we become, with reason, impatient and intolerant of painters who squander rich talent for the sake of display upon borrowed and laboured themes for which they have the most tepid interest and in the production of which not a hint of their personal observation or emotion can be detected.

What is life? we ask. "Just one thing after another," says the Fool. "A series of definite and successive changes, both of structure and composition, which take place within an individual without destroying its identity," says the Wise Man. "A succession of vivid impressions," says the artist. That is what life means to him. The artist insists upon focussing his attention upon one thing at a time and everything else is a blur at that moment. As Walter Pater put it — he wishes "to define life, not in the most abstract, but in the most concrete terms possible, to find not a universal formula for beauty or truth, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation."

In another chapter of that remarkable book, "The Renaissance," Pater says: "Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face. Some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest. Some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real to us for that moment only. . . . We are all condemned to death, with a sort of indefinite reprieve. We have our interval and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness — others in high passion — the wisest, at least, of the children of men, in art and song. . . . For art comes to us professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to our moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake." That is the best declaration I have ever seen of the motive which governs and guides the representative arts, and as many also of the presentative arts as either make their ap-

peal directly to the senses like colour, music and dancing, or strive solely for such concise and graphic effect as we find in some lyrics, prose sketches, and stories.

“Our moments as they pass” — how we waste them! The beauties that come and go with the moments — how insensible we are to their coming and going! Once gone they may return to us in memories, with the intensified emotion of dreamlike things. Yet in their turn the memories fade and the beauties are no more. Art is a means of giving permanence to our moods and memories, of restoring to us something at least of the original charms of a thousand sensuous influences that have touched our lives in passing. Most of us try to see life steadily and to see it whole. The worth of the flying moments may or may not have impressed us. At any rate it is the serious business of life which absorbs our attention, the “eternal verities” and some or all of the separate standards. Meanwhile the artist is standing by, watching the world as it passes, appreciating time as it flies, as responsive to every influence and experience as a violin to the touch of a master, striving to give his sensations and his moods emotional unity in his mind and then artistic unity in his creation — in short, to give definite form to each separate, personal impression. That is the impressionistic point of view.

### III

## ART FOR THE SAKE OF TRUTH — AND BEAUTY

(1912)

WE cannot properly appreciate that impressionism which is the function of all true pictorial art<sup>1</sup> until we have brought an open mind to the consideration of the familiar dogma of the modern studio — “art for art’s sake.” Windy wars have been waged because of it. How it wearies the mind to think of all the cross-purposes and jarring contentions! Art is certainly the richer for Whistler and his influence, but it is not because he wrangled and carefully recorded his quarrels with his critics, but because he painted pictures greater than his theories. That the seed of his æsthetic doctrines should have fallen upon inhospitable soil in Victorian England is not to be wondered at. Ruskin had taught his country either to copy Nature with painstaking fidelity or to embody exalted stories and sentiments for useful ends. Then along came Whistler — asserting — (1) that the artist must pick and choose his notes from the world’s keyboard — that “to paint Nature as she is, is to sit on the piano”; (2) that subjects are of extremely secondary importance — that a mountain is not necessarily sublime if it is painted with

<sup>1</sup> For my present opinion of this theory see page 5 of the Introductory Essay.



SUPPER AT EMMAUS

*By Rembrandt*





banal sentimentality or photographic exactitude, and that a suburban factory chimney in the evening gloom is not necessarily prosaic if seen and rendered with the eyes of the poet. In short, he insisted that a picture must exist for its own sake — that

If eyes were made for seeing — then  
Beauty is its own excuse for being.

To us this does not seem to be a very radical or unreasonable doctrine. Yet the Victorian critics blinked and sneered and the Victorian public stared and giggled. In his fight for painters' principles Whistler was practically unaided in England. In France, however, the battle had been waged and won. The stilted academic standards had been assailed and shaken by the concerted action of artists from Delacroix to Monet. With increasing strength their spirits rose and in angry defiance of continued clamour for the subject in pictures many men went to sensational extremes. Art for art's sake was then popularly and quite justly interpreted to mean, no art for truth's or beauty's sake, but art for the sake of technique, art for the sake of canvas covered thus and thus, for the sake of pigments so applied from the tubes, and brushes so manipulated, art for the sake of absolute values, and refraction and vibration, and broken tones, and spatial extension and a hundred other technical terms that are secrets of the few, obscure and unhallowed mysteries to the many. Artists have been fairly rioting in revolution and proclaiming a new dogma of their own in place of the discredited ones of the "*an-*

*cien régime.*” It is no longer art for the sake of the Church, for the sake of the Court, for the sake of Greek marbles, for the sake of the school or fireside interest in literature and history, but art for the sake of the artist, art for its own sweet sake. In effect the painter has been saying to the public — “You have made us tell stories, now you can watch us dabble in raw materials, and take our pictures to pieces to play with the parts. Our experiments will be helpful to us and bewildering to you. We have long realized that painting was falling behind the times, that we were not reflecting the life around us, that the scientific enlightenment of our age had passed us by, as if we were not concerned with psychology and invention. Now we shall make up for lost time. As for you — it will do you no harm to regard art in a new light, as no longer a subservient thing, but independent of you and your ideas, with a point of view and a dogma of its own. For centuries you have made us come to you to serve you. Now we shall see and paint what we choose and as we choose. You may take us or leave us.”

So rang the challenge and strange was the result of it. For a while people laughed at the French innovators, labelling them fantastics and barbarians, and all his life Whistler had a lively time of it with critics and a public who believed that his art like his outer life was a studied pose and an ill-natured joke. But what obscurity had never done for their more conservative predecessors in artistic progress, notoriety secured for these radicals and their teeming progeny.

With that ever-familiar, ever-curious irony of Fate, the pendulum of public opinion swung from one extreme to the other, and painters awoke to find the crowd they had affected to despise, swarming to their exhibitions and teasing them, like amusement-seeking boys, to be as unconventional as they dared. Soon the house of art became a vaudeville, a workshop, a lecture room, a laboratory, all too seldom a temple for the soul. As for the notorious performers known by various names from Post-Impressionists to Dadaists, their insincerities of extravagant distortion are evidently based upon the impudent opinion that people now-a-days will tolerate anything provided its novelty is proclaimed loud enough. The truth is that whereas a hundred years ago painters were tinting Greek and Roman statues, because they feared to take any liberties with the decorous, timorous public taste that frowned on innovation, to-day we are suffering from an excess of public tolerance in regard to art, an encouragement of any hitherto untried experiment, the madder the merrier. One truth has been conclusively proved. The cavalier declaration that art could do without the public was either a blunder or a bluff. Almost from the beginning painters have protested against the prevailing popular misconception of what art ought to be.

Of course there was a time when painting was but a step removed from penance and from prayer. At work in mystic consecration upon his wooden saints and madonnas, the friar in his cell was blessedly insensible to the impieties of beauty. Browning's Pictor

Ignotus thrilled to know that on his frescoes there was no suggestion of grace and charm, no figment of truth to life nor resemblance to that outer world whose vanities he had renounced forever. He rejoiced that although he might have won favour and fortune out in the shrill sunshine, his painted confession of faith would moulder and fade away on chill monastic walls. But all this was before the Pagan spirit of art was born again. Soon enough a strange joy came to the friar at his work. Voices and scents were borne to him on the restless winds seeming to call him to that outer world. Browning pictured him in this mood, his Lippo Lippi hungry for life and love. We may see how this human passion passed into his altar-paintings in protest. The devotional piety of the Flemish and Italian Primitives was in many cases genuine and charming. But even in such a devout spirit as Memlinc, what I prize most is the lively enamelled colour and the little blue-and-brown peeps of tapestry landscape that the painter shyly introduced as background to indulge himself in a dash of self-expression. Giorgione was the first to completely break away from ecclesiastical domination, and it was he who originated genre and the idyllic sentiment for pure landscape. But few were the men who dared to do more than protest against the prevailing fashions as Watteau protested against the frivolity which he was forced to paint for a frivolous age. The really great artists who declared war against the teaching of the schools and the taste of the buyers were all but submerged in consequence. Witness the poverty of Rembrandt, of Millet, of Sisley.

But to-day extremists reap the benefit of their epoch-making courage, and now that eccentricity is at a premium where in their day formula was law, the wildest ventures are more profitable than was their noble moderation. Of course the public does not change from age to age as much as these changes in artistic fashion would seem to indicate. The trouble is that there has always existed, through all the changes of thought and taste, throughout periods of slavery, prosperity and obscurity for the artist, the same total ignorance of the conditions that govern and limit pictorial expression. Art cannot exist without some appreciative understanding. If left to himself, the painter goes to one extreme, the public to the other, and great is the confusion. Whistler then to the contrary — I hold that the critic of art who can appreciate both points of view, and act as mediator between them, performs an indispensable function. He it is who must see to it that the artist is fair to the world and that the world is fair to the artist.

But before either of these desirable results can be secured, the artist and the world must be equally well acquainted with the various channels of artistic expression, their individual capacities and limitations. They must know that painting cannot tell a story, that it can only represent a moment's situation. They must know that it may deal with thought or emotion, but only in so far as these things may be comprehended in the colour and form through the direct agency of the uninstructed and unaided sense of sight.



The defenders of the story-telling picture make much of the fact that Rembrandt depicted incidents from the Bible. But can they point to a single canvas in which documentary evidence of a scriptural or archæological character has distracted the eye from the essential unity of æsthetic and emotional impression? At The Hague Gallery David plays his harp before Saul. Although we may not hear the music, our sight comprehends at a glance the effect which the harpist is producing upon the mind of the King. Meanwhile our eyes are feasting upon the dazzling iridescence of Saul's turban, its mingled tones of copper and bronze, scarlet and green and gold, and as we gaze a spell of sensuous witchery stirs us, like the spell of some soul-disturbing rhapsody of sound. As in all great subjective paintings the title has been only a pretext. We have beheld the glamour and shared the passion of one of Rembrandt's passing moods. Then again consider the little "Supper at Emmaus" in the Louvre. The face of Christ oppresses us with a sense of sharp, familiar suffering and at the same time uplifts our hearts to a vision of Divine inspiration and spiritual perfection. We do not need to note the awe and worship of the disciples at this sudden revelation of their dead and risen Master, for do we not share their emotion; are we not also in the radiant presence of that incarnate goodness that lifts the burdens of the world? This is not merely Christ as He appeared at Emmaus, this is the Saviour as the afflicted and inspired Rembrandt conceived Him for his own consolation, and as we in our sorrows would think of Him to the end of



time. This is not a story nor yet an incident from a story. It is a vision and a strong, sweet thought. How wonderful it is that simple technical skill achieved this miracle of spiritual expression. The technique is invisible in the subject and the subject one with the sentiment. Such is pictorial art at its highest and best.

To the familiar dogma of our present epoch that the worth of a painting can only be estimated by its technical merits, regardless of subject-matter, Rembrandt's "Supper at Emmaus" is sufficient refutation. It reveals absolutely no technical feature which would give it any great *éclat*, not even this painter's usual dramatization of light. Its supreme mastery is evidenced rather in the amazing inspiration that brushed in that Divine face. It may be said that the picture is great because of the art that produced it, but how much less great that art would have been if the painter had not been inspired by a great subject. Unquestionably a copper stew-pan by Chardin, true to life yet transfigured by his magical paint, is a nobler work of art than a head of Christ crowned with thorns in the cheap and perfumed style of Guido Reni. On the other hand, the unpretentious observations of copper stew-pans do not make for the very greatest art. The humility of such conceptions is in striking contrast to the philosophy of art as practiced and preached by the great stern symbolist J. F. Watts. By means of pictorial symbols, he sought to embody the inexorable mysteries of life and death, to reduce Creation to its primordial elements and to teach and preach the

brave old moralities with that unself-conscious seriousness so characteristic of the Victorian epoch. Watts was born in the belief that art should be brought to the service of life, that art for art's sake is no better than ritual for ritual's sake. "The idea of following art through everything for itself alone," writes Gilbert Chesterton in his brilliant book on Watts, "through extravagance, cruelty and morbidity, is exactly as superstitious as the idea of following theology for itself alone through extravagance, cruelty and morbidity. The young critics of the æsthetic school with their nuances and technical mysteries would doubtless be surprised to learn that as a class they resemble ecstatic nuns, but their principle is in reality the same." Watts was one of those universalists who thought that just as the ecstatic isolation of the religious sense had done incalculable harm to religion, so the ecstatic isolation of the æsthetic sense would do incalculable harm to art. It was his firm intention, therefore, to present great natural truths and great moral ideas and it so chanced that to express these things he selected for his medium a pictorial symbolism of colour and form. So perfectly did his symbols illuminate and exalt his noble though unoriginal ideas that they served his purpose in putting new vitality into venerable thoughts. His educational purpose was accomplished through the happy accident of a fairly original pictorial genius. There was a sublime unity to his conceptions, a unity into which vague, allegorical or topical allusions seldom intruded, a unity so clear that the world of abstract thought

seemed to spring unlaboured into shape and colour beneath his brush. Pictures have no business dealing with symbols unless they can present them without the slightest infraction of the laws of pictorial unity. Furthermore, they must improve upon language as a means of conveying thought, else they are worse than useless. In some of Watts's pictures the colours are harsh and in others the meaning seems imprisoned rather than liberated by the design. As a rule, however, he was successful, notably in his deeply symbolical portraits of men and in such concepts as the picture entitled "Hope." How beneficently then an unsuspected power within an artist supplements and ennobles his limited intentions! Whistler proposed no more for himself than a decorative tracery of lines, an atmospheric valuation of tones, and a harmonious modulation of colours. In spite of his railing against subjects and sentiments, however, it is subject and sentiment rather than any æsthetic "note" that will cause his Nocturnes to endure, and in the best of his portraits he owed much of his success to the inspiration of his models. And so it was with Watts, whose art was conceived for the general good, but whose pictures are more likely to appeal to such critics of the subtler phases of beauty as can appreciate with what unique pictorial intuition and skill he gave original colour and form to unoriginal abstractions.

It is quite true that the art of painting deals by preference with the concrete rather than the abstract,

with the evidence of things seen rather than with any intangible fabric of thought. Watts, however, demonstrated that thought may be given a deeper and more intense life through concrete form and colour than is the life of thoughts which, although forming and colouring the mind, have never found pictorial symbols identical with themselves. Now, even as Watts disregarded the rule that painting should avoid the abstract, so Rodin has been demolishing our traditional conception of sculpture as an art steeped in convention and remote from the life around us, a Greek or Egyptian world of embodied ideals and abstractions. That sculpture should be concrete and individual in character was a principle persistently accepted by the Gothic craftsman in his gargoyles and statued saints. What the Italian Renaissance then accomplished was to make sculpture pictorial and expressive of personal conceptions. It remained for Rodin to apply impressionism as well as imagination to the plastic depiction of life. Influenced by Dante and Donatello he tries to reveal subtleties of sense and emotion, to give shape not to life's epic oneness, but rather to its dramatic many-sidedness. Most sculpture is abstract and static, Rodin's is concrete and dynamic. Put his "Penseur" by the side of a marble Faun of ancient Greece and behold the difference between the virile animal body of Man, shaken with passion and aspiring purpose, and the serenely exquisite body of the old myth-maker's dream. Sculptors, following the archaic standards, convert life into structural, monumental art. Rodin converts the raw materials of his craft



into a new creation, a re-shaping of his hired models so that they live again as in the flesh — quivering to the touch of love or under the lash of fear. Man is shown in his ugliness and splendid strength, his power and his pity, Woman in her tenderness and irresistible grace, her yielding and withholding. And in leaving his creations unsevered from the mass of marble or bronze, he suggests the organic union of life and art, life that is the root of art, art that is the flower of life. All art is symbolical, since art can only appeal to the intelligence through signs representing a thought or a thing. But what a difference may exist between two symbols, both indispensable in their own way; for instance, between a peach imitated from life by Chardin and "The Mystery of Existence" shaped in bronze by St. Gaudens. The mystery of existence in bronze, how vast the daring of it! You may see this nameless creation in a suburban cemetery near the city of Washington. A draped figure sits erect at the side of the tomb. The body is rigid yet under firm control. Only the face is bared and the lean, strong arm which supports it. The features also are fixed and the unseeing eyes gaze into infinity. This is neither Man nor Woman, for it is both. This is something sexless — universal — inscrutable. A figure of Grief one might divine, but grief seldom is so passionless. The eyes have the rigidity of eyes that can no longer weep, of a soul from which even hope has long since fled. Is this then "Despair"? Some have suggested "Nirvana," the oblivion for which the Oriental yearns. But the artist who made this thing would never give his sym-

bol a definite title. Once only he is quoted as remarking, "What did I mean to express? Oh, I suppose, the mystery of the whole affair." One thinks of Shakespeare, of the significant lines —

We are such stuff as dreams are made on,  
And our little life is rounded with a sleep.

To those, then, who claim that the pictorial and plastic arts are incapable of properly expressing thought and emotion, and should confine their efforts to the production of visual effects, æsthetic or scientific, there is only one answer. The painter has just as much right to describe his thoughts through colour and form as the writer to describe his observations through language. The only rule that each must observe is — "To your own art be true." When the writer is attempting a landscape or a portrait he must keep his readers mindful that his pictures are only painted with words, literary suggestions of pictures, and when the painter is trying to express his thoughts, he must give them each a visual unity of conception so that, intent only on the colours and forms, we may look not for literary ideas but for the pictorial suggestions of ideas. Emphatically paintings can and should deal with the mind and the emotions, provided they act through the direct agency of the eyes. And so, if we are informed that the subjects of pictures do not matter, let us merely point to Rembrandt's "Supper at Emmaus" and inquire wherein lies the greatness of this little canvas save in the inspiration the artist derived from his subject. And if they tell us that paint-



ing cannot embody thought, nor sculpture draw thought from substance, let us lead them to Watts and to Rodin and allow these giants to speak for themselves. Finally, if in turn we wish to demonstrate that the true artists among the advocates of art for art's sake do not mean all that they say nor practice all that they preach, we need to go no farther for an illustration than Whistler's portrait of his Mother. This is primarily a very personal, a very beautiful tribute to motherhood. Yet it is at the same time a decorative design of originality and charm. And here we may know the reason why Whistler is a greater painter than Watts. He was always true to his art, always decorative. For, in the last analysis, although painting may incidentally be useful, instructive, entertaining, edifying, or the reverse of these things, its original and fundamental function is not intellectual but æsthetic, not to criticise life but to decorate it, "*not merely to convince but to enchant.*" It may imitate a peach or express the sympathy of Christ, but in either case its highest purpose is to create a thing of beauty that shall be to us a joy forever. Life indeed contains all that we need of beauty, the constituents of all colour, the materials of all form. But alas, while a wonderful accident of light is for a moment transforming our earth into a realm of enchantment, we are thinking of the price of a certain commodity in a certain market, or of what we said last week and wish we had not said. And verily we have eyes and see not and the beauty of the moment passes as if for us it had never been. But the

true artist and the genuine lover of art, the creator who finds pictures in Nature, and the critic who finds Nature in pictures, they have eyes if they have nothing else. They may be without the price of a meal ticket, but they possess the sense of beauty, and as long as they nourish and cherish such a living joy in their hearts, life may be tragic or sordid, but never uninteresting. The ascent of the mountain of endeavour may seem to them a particularly steep and arduous pilgrimage, but they will never be blind to the beauties on the way, they will always find time to draw deep breaths of tonic air and enjoy the view. And whether or not they scale the mountain to its cloudy pinnacle, as long as they breathe the air that is made of dreams there is nothing so real but shall have a fascination, and nothing so strange but imagination can make it real. And the creators who see beauty and feel it, and then through a mystical wizardry of their own, record it with a new glamour which, but for them, we should never have known, they are the harps played over by the winds of all experience. The influence of great art upon receptive spirits is as great as any influence on earth. Great art passes into our consciousness, there to abide. We may no longer see the morning sunlight stream across a space of bare white wall or fall upon a piece of deep blue velvet without thinking how Vermeer could quicken the pulse of æsthetic pleasure with his transcripts of just such simple things. We may no longer feel the spell of woodland twilight when the dew silvers the tremulous dim leaves, and the apri-

cot glow of dawning or departing day flushes the far horizons, without summoning the joyous spirit of Corot and entering once more that spirit-land from which it is such an effort to awake. I remember a little picture in Amsterdam, by that unique painter, Matthew Maris, which stirred me strangely when I saw it, and which haunts me yet. It was a subtle effect of atmosphere, a village street in partial shadow, its quaint gray houses dark against a sky all flooded with white light. Somewhere I had seen just such an effect. Suddenly a lost moment was restored to me and recorded on canvas, a rare, rich moment of unusual perception selected from ten thousand by a man who knew how to see, by an artist who could give his vision permanence. That is pictorial art in its essential relation to life; art for the sake of nothing save only Beauty, and for the sake of that incomparable joy with which Beauty thrills the soul.

# IV

## REVOLUTIONS AND REACTIONS IN PAINTING

(1914 — ANNOTATED 1926)

**A**TTEMPTING to define what painting ought to be, that profound critic, Thomas Coleridge, arrived at the true meaning of Impressionism in the pictorial arts. "Painting," he said, "is the middle quality between a thought and a thing, the union of that which is Nature with that which is exclusively human." Now among the great Impressionists this middle quality has been established and maintained. In the best pictures by Velasquez the balance was absolutely perfect. If to-day he is considered the greatest painter of all times, it is because, in making us see the truth of just what he saw, he also made us feel the beauty of just what he felt. Thus we learned from him both the beauty of truth, so variously appealing to us all, and the truth of beauty, as revealed to his individual consciousness. The great landscape painters were equally true to this æsthetic impressionism. It was Constable who first applied to the study of earth and sky the great principle Velasquez had formulated, namely, the difference between fact and appearance, between actuality and the truth of visual sensation. Yet, although this great pathfinder was the first to do justice to the good, familiar world out-of-doors, the first to discard the drop-curtain which



MOUNT ST. VICTOIRE

*By Cézanne*







had so long passed for landscape, his daring brush did not, in its pride, obtrude its new devices. The balance was maintained. Once again, with Corot, it was the soul of the great poet combined with the enlightened skill of the observant naturalist which cast both the illusion of reality and the spell of fairyland over the commonplace suburbs of Paris. It seems then that Coleridge was absolutely right when he said, "Painting is the middle quality between a thought and a thing."

In approaching the exhibitions of these latter days we discover at once how technique has come to vaunt itself, to overwhelm both subject and sentiment. The means of expression are of more concern than the thing to be expressed, and all too often, in spite of many pretensions to the contrary, painters express nothing but the newness of their paint, or the newness of their particular cult. As I write, the air of studios in New York is charged with much talk about painting, talk which is full of fanaticism and mystification and real concern for the future of art, all agitated by a recent exposure of crass sensationalism in pictures — an International Exhibition of Modern Art, parts of which are quite stupefying. With this experience fresh in memory the first thought that occurs to me about extreme modernism is that it is lawless, the second, following fast upon the first, is that its lawlessness has in many cases made the painter a slave to his own mad whims and bad habits. Superficially the philosophy of the new movement has a gallant air. Gauguin's much-quoted classification of painters as

either plagiarists or revolutionists was like a call to battle. The motley horde of studio-adventurers heard the call. To-day they are riotously proclaiming that everything shall be upside down, that in the new art no woman need have a mouth. Instead she may have both eyes on the same side of her face. It is not true. But who shall say what is truth?

Of course such extremists are anarchists, not artists. When I say that in these latter days technique has come to vaunt itself — to overwhelm subject and sentiment, I am thinking of the most brilliant artists of our period — men who are making the most vivid history of our own time. Some of them are Romanticists, others Realists — but an influence common to both their camps keeps their advance in a similar direction. This influence is the scientific spirit of the age. Nature is now revered, not so much for its spiritual appeal nor as a wonderful background for the human drama but for its evanescent effects, its fascinating problems, *or for its raw materials of form and colour available to the artist in his experiments with pattern.* The essential characteristic of the prevailing impressionism is the delight in the display of skill. Of course there are less adventurous spirits content to tell tales to the sentimental public in much the old Victorian fashion or to follow the Barbizon tradition in landscape with unassuming reverence. But the bigger men have been ever abreast of the times, striving to render sensation, eager to shock the eye into recognition of an unsuspected beauty, to hold the mind with a thrill of new interest or to lead it down a

twisting lane of fanciful suggestion. When from the proper perspective the annals of the period are written, the names of an amazing host of talented painters will have to be reckoned with. There have been romancers and symbolists, decorators of surfaces great and small, clever and concise analysts of outdoor and indoor light, of men and women of all classes and types, of woods and fields in every season, of city streets and rock-bound coasts. Art has been independent and irrepressible. Painters have worked side by side along widely divergent lines and each man true to his own philosophy. In this way our children's children shall know us, the many-sidedness of our lives, the complex diversities of our interests, as perhaps no other age has ever been known before. Yet through all this varied achievement a single spirit has been all-pervasive, a spirit of joy in painting for painting's sake, in the successful performance of tricks, in the overcoming of self-imposed difficulties, in the production of subtle and novel effects, in all the excitements of virtuosity. Painters are in danger nowadays of forgetting that the best art is "the middle quality between a thought and a thing." Such mystical dreamers as Odilon Redon and Matthew Maris have left us nothing but the thought, all too subtly suggested for the sake of a special sort of beauty. Such unemotional observers as John Singer Sargent have left us nothing but the thing all too plainly presented for the sake of a special sort of truth. But the union — the union of that which is Nature with that which is exclusively human — this *essential*

*compromise*, modern art seems for the most part too self-conscious, too self-sufficient, ever quite to attain.

Objectivity is the main characteristic of the contemporary naturalists, and this is true of the portrait painters, the painters of genre, and of landscape. Sargent in his portraits never paints what he does not actually see. If there is a mask of false pretenses between him and his sitter, he will not attempt to penetrate it, choosing rather to paint it in with particular care. This objectivity of vision is even more a characteristic of our American landscape painters, many of whom delight in the depiction of the most uninteresting scenery. E. W. Redfield paints little else than the slushy roads, the flat and barren fields, the squat, crude houses, within a short distance of the Delaware River. Yet his wintry weather is so literally true that we seem to breathe frosty, tingling air, and hear the crunch of crusted snow under our boots. In the Metropolitan Museum there is an example of the work of George Bellows, a young man of great talent all too often misapplied. The picture is called "Up the Hudson," but a better title would have been "March Winds." The air seems vibrant with a passionate gust, the kind that stings and roars in passing. Yet there is no over-accentuation, no bending tree-tops, no blown skirts. From behind a cloud the sun has reappeared, although part of the river and the farther shore are still in shadow. The foreground stands out almost depressingly clear in the thin air and hard, cold light. A sleek black locomotive has just burst into sight from around a curve, and steaming briskly in the



opposite direction a merry little tug works its willing way upstream, while the white caps sparkle and the wind roars. At just such a place, in just such weather, we have experienced just such an emotion. Or is it only a sensation? There is a wholly unexpected beauty in such plain speaking.

This wholesome objectivity, derived from Courbet, has been subjected to innumerable experiments and adventures. Manet was among the first in this field. From portraiture of a distinguished quality reminiscent of the early simplifications of Hals and Goya, he turned in later years to the study of light and the new, high-keyed palette, and soon became absorbed in such problems as sunlight filtered through foliage upon white dresses and black hats, or the artificial illumination of ballrooms and theatres. To him and to Degas, who with classic grace, Japanese waywardness, and Gallic irony, celebrated the ballet girl, we are indebted for more than the mere outward semblance of Paris, rather the spectacle of modern life as seen through the specializing modern temperament. Besnard has attenuated the achievements of Manet and Degas. He will display the curious blue effect of morning sunlight from an unseen window reflected on one side of a woman's body, while the other side catches the flickering gleam of firelight from an unseen hearth. Such trick pictures have a certain fascination. Of that there can be no doubt. This, however, is objectivity becoming unwholesome, since no beauty can come of it unless we concede beauty to all things skilfully handled. When art is made into a science it loses its own iden-

tity. As that thorough modernist, George Moore, acknowledged, "great art sees, dreams, expresses but reasons never, never calculates." Calculation, he declared, was a sure sign of decadence in pictorial creation. Now Claude Monet was himself a great master whose enthusiasm for the truth of aerial vibration was almost lyrical, almost sun-worship. Yet the important system he discovered actuated such extremists as Signac to multicoloured stitches guaranteed to make the air vibrate with accuracy.

It was a reaction from this excessive objectivity that induced the challenging Cézanne and his excited disciple Van Gogh to imagine that they saw nature subjectively with special sensations of their very own and the half-savage Gauguin to return altogether to savagery in order to free his ego from the complications and calculations of science. The incoherent ideas of the Cubists and the Post-Impressionists followed these men in logical succession. The creative mind is apt to be always in a ferment of revolt against whatever mental fashion or convention happens to be prevailing. Revolutions in the style of painting are the natural consequence of the perfectly normal desire of painters to attract attention to their hitherto neglected talents. When a painter realizes that he cannot hope to compete with the past, he falls back upon the consoling thought that at least he may anticipate the future. There have always been Futurists because there have always been failures; also, let me hasten to add, because change is necessary to life — art stagnating when invention stands still. Yet



change does not necessarily mean progress, and the art of the future is not necessarily an advance upon the art of the past. The history of art is a history of reactions. A reaction from either genuinely primitive or pseudo-primitive crudity will tend to bring us back to culture, its complexities and refinements. A Renaissance is apt to degenerate into an eclectic period impotent to invent on its own account. Consequently new initiative is needed and the Pseudo-Primitives promptly appear again. But with each revolt against outworn convention a new convention is sure to be established — and so school succeeds school and the cycles of reaction go round. Time winnows the wheat from the chaff, for individuals are greater than schools and their systems and revolutions. Time relentlessly discards the men of the decadence of stagnation who obey laws without thinking and imitate what has gone before — weak from overmuch knowledge and humility. And Time rejects with scorn the claims to consideration of those charlatans who imitate, not the best but the *worst* forms and colours that the hand of man can devise. But let us return to our story of revolutions and reactions.

Italy was the fashion until Watteau adapted the Italian idyll to French taste and his own intimate emotion. When the French Revolution had swept aside the prettiness that had degenerated into a convention with Watteau's imitators, the Consulate and the Empire set up instead, for the guidance of artists, the sterner forms of Roman and Greek statues; a formidable revival of classic outlines and imposing

subjects from history which left no room for the personal impression. It was in fierce revolt against this depressing dogmatism and archæology that Delacroix defied the rule of Ingres and asserted the need of freedom for the imagination. But his paintings were in their turn discovered to be too literary — still too dependent upon subject for inspiration, like the novels of Scott and the poems of Byron. It was Constable who rediscovered the wonders of light and the romance of reality which Vermeer had known, and Constable it was who fathered the Barbizon painters of France. Then came a blunt proud peasant named Courbet, who said in effect, “the romance of reality be damned! Get down to facts.” Thus he ushered in the uncompromising Naturalists and their descendants the Optical Illusionists. As I have already observed, Monet was a great master, but light was his obsession, and when once his theory had been exaggerated by extremists, his fine, strong art degenerated into a neat little science. From all this objectivity reaction set in, and behold the present orgy of the subjective at the International Exhibition.

That the Cubists are doing something new cannot be denied, although just what it is that they are doing no one has yet perceived. Seen with sufficient sympathy, might not these visions symbolize the chaos before creation or the crash at the end of everything? One picture looked to me like the wreck of an aeroplane, another something like a landslide, a third very like a bad dream, perhaps a carpenter’s nightmare of ten thousand splintered shingles. But no, the first

was entitled, "Portrait of a Man," the second, "Religious Procession in Seville," the third, "A Nude Descending a Staircase." In the newspaper the other day I read an explanation of these mysteries of Picasso, of Picabia, of Marcel Duchamps. "The objectivity of the subjectivity is in every case superinduced by the original sensation." At the exhibition it was interesting to look at the people. Occasionally I detected a sly smile or a suppressed laugh, but for the most part a pitiful struggle was going on to find sense in the nonsense, to discover the connection between the titles in the catalogue and the self-conscious cubes and colours on the walls. One such picture might have relegated its creator to a sanatorium. But a hundred and more! Evidently an important movement! Evidently to be taken in all seriousness! And so they stood about agonizing themselves into the frame of mind which in the end made everything quite clear to them, and the complicated emotions of the Cubists and the Futurists their emotions no less.

The movement is not new. It is in its last decrepitude. It is not a beginning. It is the end of a reaction against impersonal truth-telling in pictures that had reached its limit (for the present) in Courbet, Manet, and Monet, and against subjective æstheticism in pictures that could go no farther (for the present) than the Japanese "arrangements" of Whistler and the stained-glass beatitudes of the pre-Raphaelites. Then it was that Paul Cézanne decided that painters were becoming too unemotional and scientific in their conceptions of truth, and too effeminate or too liter-

ary in their embodiments of beauty. Cézanne, a bourgeois of independent mind as well as income, was an austere, dogmatic advocate of pure painting and he was out of sympathy with the gaiety of the Luminarists and their pursuit of what seemed to him the evanescent and ephemeral. He looked back, where Greco pointed, to the formal architectonic grandeur and immobility of the Byzantine Primitives and decided "to make out of Impressionism something durable like the art of the museums." What had appealed to him about the Impressionists, with whom he was associated in rebellion against authority, was their fluent use of colour, which he rightly considered the essential medium of painting. But he claimed that in the Impressionist pictures forms were altered by every change of illumination so that one never felt a sense of the eternal structure of nature. His idea was to draw with colour, suggesting depth by a trick of shifted planes, "a series of colour-touches following each other by contrast or analogy according as the form was to be interrupted or merely varied." In other words, modulation of colour, according to its warm and advancing or cool and receding qualities, was used for modelling of forms and suggestion of space, and at the same time the colours were employed schematically as logical patches in a formal pattern. But the chief significance of Cézanne is simply this — that like Van Gogh and Gauguin, who differed from him very widely in their separate aims, he was an independent thinker who reacted against both the romanticism which overemphasized the liter-



ary interest of subjects in painting and the impressionistic naturalism which made representation more and more concrete and particular instead of making it as he thought it should be, more abstract and formal. He was absolutely sincere. But the time was ripe for impostors. Democracy had made us all more or less educated and more or less anxious to have emancipated opinions about everything, including art. The spirit of revolt against authority and of skeptical challenge to established standards which made science shake theology to its foundations, turned in time upon science itself and upon art itself and started a new cult of the simple life, the primitive mind, of simplification and distortion in art, with the abolition of hitherto respected standards.

Gauguin then determined to lay the foundations for an "art of the future" which was to be an art of personal expression — beginning as in childhood, with the most naïve exclamations of surprise upon beholding the most homely and familiar objects. To this infantile point of view — free from all prejudice, and preconception — Matisse and his followers, "les Fauves," have trained their vision, and the deliberate crudities they created had so unmistakable a quality of elemental frankness that young revolutionists dreamed of returning through this art to the secret of the cave man's simplicity wherefrom to begin all over again. Drawing was to be as free as the thought that guides it, and emotion free from all restraint of knowledge. The fallacy of such expression was obvious. This was no return to Nature. Instead of devotion to

the naturalistic and romantic periods of the past, to the Greek or Florentine standard of form, the Venetian or Flemish standard of colour, the Velasquez or Vermeer standard of values, the Dutch or Chardin standard of surface quality, these men harked back instead to more primitive models, to Gothic gargoyles, to Egyptian low reliefs, to Indian carvings, to Persian miniatures, to Negro sculpture, to Polynesian pots and textiles. With Matisse <sup>1</sup> degeneration declaims from the house-tops. Certainly this man has created patterns unworthy of the mere ignorance of children and savages. Matisse calls our attention rather insolently to his method of drawing like a child or a savage. He is even more crude in his obviousness than is Miss Amy Lowell when she calls attention to her

<sup>1</sup> Matisse was subjected to much unthinking abuse and ridicule by those who did not understand what he was trying to do. — Alas that I should have contributed to the scandal! I feel that I should atone for my own rash expression of blind prejudice against this artist by reprinting one of the more unfortunate passages from my early writings. Now I am ready to recognize in Matisse a daring and lucid agitator for direct decorative expression and luminous chromatic experiment. His rhythmical distortions and light-producing cacophonies were sensational, but only for as long as it was necessary to attract attention and to arouse discussion. I still suspect him of a habit of mind which is often deliberately provoking. Seriousness and respect for the public are certainly not his most obvious virtues. Yet he is capable not only of truly original creation, of a line always ornamental and often sculptural, of a keyboard of colour on which he plays thrilling improvisations with breathtaking dissonances, a keyboard over which he plunges from abysmal depths to dazzling heights of the colour-scale, but of much taste and elegance in the matching of colours and their demarcation with strong outlines. After all is said he must be acknowledged as the brilliant descendant of a great Oriental tradition, and an heir especially of the Persians. He is one of those rare artists who dare to create an abstract style which corresponds with their crystal-clear mental conceptions and with their exhilarating visual sensations.

D. P., November, 1926



unrhymed cadences, stressing her accents by means of metrical arrangements until all the mysterious subtlety of the ancient music of rhythmic prose has been spoiled and sacrificed. The argument that good drawing is not anatomically correct drawing, but emotionally rhythmical and expressive use of line is undeniable. No brutal distortions are necessary to prove the point. What was sincere and touching in the vision of the true Primitives is repellent when imitated by the Pseudo-Primitives. The simplicity of Matisse imitating a child of three is about as simple as that of a soubrette talking "baby-talk" to her partner in vaudeville. The fallacy of the thing is obvious. In renouncing what we have gained we cannot hope to regain what we have lost. The Post-Impressionists and Cubists, the Futurists, Synchronists, Orphists, Dadaists, and Heaven only knows how many more performing pets would not have become so fashionable with the faddists of our enlarged electorate if Cézanne, that isolated man of genius whose leadership they claim, had lived a little longer to repudiate such followers. He had already repudiated Gauguin, who was sincere enough, and who really belonged with the natives of the South Sea Islands.

But we need not tremble for the future of art in America because of the International Exhibition of Modern Art and the widespread excitement it has created. All shall be for the best. By contrast with the excesses of these extremists from abroad, what now seems too radical in the work of many vital and genuinely progressive painters will appear safe and

sane. As for our more timid painters, the men hitherto inclined to self-restraint and strict adherence to popular demand, they will now be spurred to more independence and abandonment of mood by the knowledge that even monstrous things can be perpetrated upon the good-nature of unthinking people, who are now apparently eager to appreciate the various aspirations of art, and are simply in dire need of being instructed to distinguish between the false and the true. Reaction to a period of sensitive æstheticism and sound intellectuality seems inevitable. There will be, unless I am much mistaken, a return, if not to classic formula, at least to a classic respect for form and to classic standards of beauty that are never outworn, though forever changing with the changes in our lives, and the inevitable reactions. Of course, we shall not lose the value of what we have so recently gained, the recognition of beauty in modern life, even in its momentary appearances, a palette true to the lights and darks of the all-pervading atmosphere, the mastery of simplification and synthesis, the use of planes as well as lines, the conquest of space and volume, the personal way of seeing and recording personal philosophy and vision in design, which may be said to constitute what we mean by the word "style." Subjects, moreover, will soon be once again of real importance to pictures, although they will have to be subtly suggestive rather than tediously descriptive as in the olden days.

## V

### NATIONALITY IN PICTURES

(1913)

NATIONS, like individuals, have characters of their own. Just as the character of an individual is moulded by influences that have entered his being before birth or touched his life in passing, so the character of a nation represents the composite mind, temperament and experience of its people. If it is the larger part of the function of art to express the character of life, it follows that the most significant to Society and History will be that art which represents not the few but the many, and depicts the mental life not of any one class, but of a whole nation. Technically the greatest perfection of workmanship has frequently been attained in periods when art was a matter of patrician or priestly patronage conveying the aristocratic or clerical viewpoint with all of its implied dogma. But in so far as there is any truth in the saying that art is the expression of life, the one-sidedness of so specialized and conventionalized an expression as we find in periods when the people's point of view is of no consequence, must detract from its deeper significance. The most comprehensible epochs of artistic expression have been those in which nations were permeated through and through with the sense of beauty and the value of their own minds and moods. True nationality in art is only possible when the people have

the opportunity and encouragement to express themselves, free from any mental reservation as to the adequacy or importance of their own point of view. The subjection of an artist, either voluntary or compulsory, to any power, temporal or ecclesiastical, simply means that he is content to submerge his own craving for self-expression in order to supply a demand. Since the integrity of national art depends upon the creative integrity of the individuals that make up a nation, then the artist who follows the tradition of a class or obeys the fashion of a cult is really less national in his aim than the artist who just works for himself and himself alone.

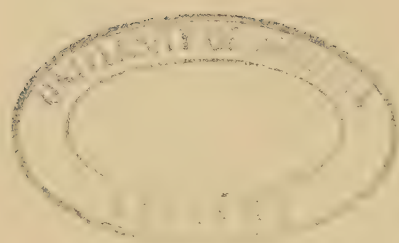
In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy there was a nation-wide interest and activity in the making of beautiful things. Never before or since have art and life been more closely related. The worst pictures were full of snobbery and insignificant detail but the best pictures were true by instinct to the unity of impression demanded by æsthetic principle. Art was the language of all people, high and low. There was no dream too lofty and abstract, no detail of life too insignificant for depiction. No Prince nor Pope was too powerful a force in the world of action to disdain the creations of the humblest dreamer, and if the Church was chiefly the patron of art it was because art was genuinely the passion of the Church. What more vivid record could have been made of the brilliant semi-Oriental pageantry of life in fifteenth-century Venice than we behold in the pictorial stories of Carpaccio, or of the quaint mysticism and naïve





BOATING PARTY AT LUNCHEON

*By Renoir*





classicism of Florence at the same period, as embodied in the pictorial fables of Piero di Cosimo. Venice was seafaring and prosperous. Consequently her art was materialistic and sumptuously decorative. Florence was the seat of mediæval and classical learning. Consequently her art was a blend of these warring intellectual elements. And yet, in spite of these separate nationalities throughout the Peninsula, art was a privilege which belonged everywhere to the people, instructing their minds, inspiring their religion, giving them the opportunity for the exchange of observations and ideas, which books, magazines and newspapers do to-day.

However, in spite of its true democracy of art the High Renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indirectly exerted a baneful influence which in the end made art anything but democratic. So great had been the achievement, that the less imaginative age which followed, despaired of improvement and consequently set to work either to copy revered models or to outshine them in grandeur of subject-matter. There was much talk about the Ideal, and the search for it, as if such a thing could ever be found on this earth even in Greece or Italy. This scholasticism required leisure to travel and the culture consequent upon study, opportunities denied to all save the upper classes. Art became a flattering servant of royalty, veneered with elegance and love of the "grand manner." Frivory ruined the talent of all but the very greatest artists of the eighteenth century and two or three men of genius alone stood out from the prevailing mode and

became the very synonym of sincerity. I refer especially to Chardin but also to Copley, Hogarth, and Blake. It must be admitted, however, that men like Canaletto, Guardi, Bellotto, Watteau, Longhi, Fragonard, Moreau, and, at their best, Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Romney were not only distinguished in spite of their allegiance to the all too insistent aristocracy of art, but really, to a certain extent, because of it. They seem to have been born for the purpose of expressing the charm of life's romantic comedy in the days of minuets and duels, of silks, satins and perukes promenading on the Venice piazza and Pierrot serenading by the light of the moon, of Mrs. Siddons posing as the Muse of Tragedy and Lady Hamilton as a Priestess of Bacchus. If, as one critic has written, the humble labourer appeared in the eighteenth-century picture as he did in Morland and Stubbs, it was "basking in the sunlight among domestic animals in a sweet little ivy-clad cottage, clean and contented, and quite as inanimate as the rural scenery of which he was a painted part." Meanwhile this same labourer was brooding sullenly over his distressful grievances and preparing for the great revolution. Even at its very best, with Chardin alone excepted, and he was a curious survival of the preceding age in Holland, eighteenth-century art in Europe was bounded by the wealth and culture and rather snobbish mental attitude of the aristocracy. It was life, of course, a true section of it, but only so much of the world as may be seen in formal gardens through the mullioned windows of country houses, only so

much as seemed pleasing to the eye of the withdrawn and supersensitive leisure classes.

A truly national art must grow up out of the soil and retain something of its savour. It must be as truly a flowering of a nation's life as a thought or deed is a flowering of an individual's spirit. A national art reflects national character, and if a nation's character is dormant or insincere, or narrowed by class prejudice, its art will surely be dull or artificial or bound by convention. Great artists may be born in epochs when national art is impossible. It may be that these great artists are handicapped in expressing the individuality of their nation by some overwhelming foreign influence prevalent in their day. Rubens succeeded in expressing Italian inspiration with truly Flemish qualities of execution, and Watteau in adapting Italian inspiration and Flemish execution to the exigencies of French taste. But, although the original inspiration had been potent for all sorts and conditions of Italians, when it passed to Flanders it became imbued with the pungency of all things exotic, and so only suited to the palate of the travelled aristocracy, and when it was served to France it went straight to the Court at Versailles, for who but kings could appreciate flavours so piquant and recherché? But there are always other great painters who reject foreign influences and are sufficiently far-sighted to perceive the æsthetic possibilities of native subjects long before this consciousness has dawned for the majority of their people. Such a man was peasant Breughel in Belgium. Living in a period when the

honest aspiring creations of the Gothic centuries were being abandoned, and Italian influences absorbed to the death of nationality in Flemish art, he held out sturdily for the national character and the local inspiration. Progress was necessary. Men had learned to see things in a larger way than the old illuminators. But it was to the Gothic tradition of quaint curiosity and decorative brightness that Breughel returned. We see in the art of Breughel a conscious impulse to express national life and character. He painted, with evident relish in the novelty of his work, decorative types of home scenery and diverting types of fellow-countrymen. But nationality is only superficially typical. Essentially it is a matter of *individual* character. This interest in the separate existence of men and women simply because of their separate manhood and womanhood, this interest in the appearance of town and country, not as a background, but for the love of woods and fields, in short, this new æsthetic point of view was the product of a Northern civilization and of a secular and democratic conception of art which did not attain greatness until the Holland of the seventeenth century.

The Southern Renaissance, for all its encouragement of art among the people, had been absolutely a matter of patrician patronage. Hence the inevitable conventionalization of pictures — the glorification of Church and State. But the time came when Church and State ceased to dictate to art. In the first place the Dutch government was a popular one. Successful war had made it so. In the second place there was na-



tional union; no warring factions and tributary states as in Italy, each with a national character of its own. It is significant that the Dutch painters did not depict scenes of war, but of the peace which followed victory. The Dutch genius for knowing its own capacities was at once revealed — the instinct which has made Dutch art up to the present day a triumph of sweet reasonableness. The reformed church no longer needed decoration. Therefore the decorative impulse was directed to the home. Art was under no obligation to princes and to priests. Therefore it was independent — a means of self-expression for the people. Prosperous and full of assurance, the swaggering Dutchmen relaxed themselves after their adventures, took their ease in their inns with the merriest companions, and delighted to return to their pleasant houses and comfortable wives and boisterous children. It was a good world in which they lived, and as they neither knew nor cared to bother about any other, it was their own good world they wished to see reflected in pictures.

Every self-respecting Hollander had his portrait painted and groups were quite the thing for Directors' Meetings and Hunting Clubs. People went to Frans Hals and Van der Helst much as we now go to the photographer. Jan Steen and Van Ostade painted tavern life and the family gatherings of the lower classes. Adrian van de Velde observed street corners, market places and farmyards with a new knowledge of outdoor light and changing weather. Van Goyen sensitively transcribed Holland's moisture-laden atmo-

sphere, and Cuyp was in his happiest mood when the humid air was made to shimmer with the suffusion of sunlit mist after an evening shower. De Hooghe was at his best with little vistas of cheerful rooms, sunlight streaming in across the checkered tiles through open doors and windows. Vermeer's daylight was cooler and more evenly diffused, enveloping objects in a silvery lustre. Even more modern than his interiors is the glorious "View of Delft" at The Hague — the direct inspiration of the virile Jacob Maris, and certainly one of the two or three supreme pictures of the world. Metsu and Terborch were less interested in daylight than in the material surroundings of patrician families. They have never been excelled in the painting of velvet, satin, lace and crêpe, or armour, pewter, glass and Oriental rugs. In striking contrast the great Rembrandt saw life not objectively but with intense personal feeling. In him the aspiring quality of North Gothic romanticism transcended the blunt, uncompromising realism of his own race. Then there was Ruysdael with his melancholy—a mood of personal sorrow intensified by Holland's almost oppressive immensities of storm-swept sky. In revealing their own passionate souls these two great poet-painters revealed also their nation's capacity for passion. But they were not as characteristic of their race as the more objective painters. Calm observation and sane, straightforward comment upon the neighbours at their day's work, such was the aim and such the real significance of the Dutch character in art.

In modern times, with the opening of her ports to



Western influences, Dutch merchants brought to Japan its first conception of an art representative, not only of real life, but of concrete, individualized portraits and landscapes. It was unquestionably this revelation from the West that actuated the growth of the popular school, known as the Ukiyoe or "Mirror of the Passing World." The name is in itself significant. The Japanese have ever been sensitive to the fugitive nature of life's appearances. For centuries they painted thoughts about the passage of clouds or the flight of birds across the moon. Now they decided to paint not thoughts but things, and to record the transitory beauties of their own life and their own surroundings. It was an art of the people. We are told that the colour prints now esteemed so highly were sold for a few yen and pasted on kitchen screens, as our newspaper supplements are to-day. Consequently these prints were despised by the aristocrats who clung to their long-lost Tang and Sung inspiration. Consequently this plebeian art is as one-sided in its way as the art of the aristocracy. To comprehend the entire national character it is necessary to regard these separate schools as the broken segments of one æsthetic consciousness. Together they express the national character. Instead of the Dutch individuality in characterization, we find in the colour prints a satisfaction with generalized types, as in Breughel, and also his splendid decorative synthesis, his big pictorial vision, his calligraphic arabesque, symbolically conveying a sense of local colour and of national character. For us of the Western world the charm of the colour prints is

partly a sensuous influence of absolutely arbitrary colour and design, partly a stimulant to our curiosity for exotic knowledge and to our decorative imagination. Western travellers in Japan invariably want to carry away with them a more composite expression of Japanese taste and character than the mere facts of photography convey. Now the prints are an Occidental kind of commentary on the life and customs of the Japanese people, by their own illustrators, just at the period of their nation's awakening to Western civilization. It is particularly fortunate that as works of art they are of such vivid attractiveness, for they sum up not only the truth at the depths but the charm on the surface of all things Japanese.

Professor Fenollosa used to say, in a rather fanciful but very fascinating vein of reflection, that it is to Japan we must look for the universal art of the future, the art which will perfectly combine all that is best in the æsthetic self-expression of Orient and Occident. It is quite true that, set uniquely on the path of traffic between East and West, Japan is further endowed with just the receptive and constructive genius necessary for becoming the interpreter of East to West and of West to East. It is just such universal scholarship as belonged to Fenollosa and Lafcadio Hearn that could bring about so rare an amalgamation.

The exchange of influences from the opposite ends of the world has certainly been, and will probably continue to be, very great. The school of Ukiyo in Japan originated by Dutch influence, was instrumental in producing a new epoch of art, not only in the

Far East but also in Europe and America. To its influence we owe the modern arts of decorative illustration and inexpensive decoration for the people, which have so profoundly affected national life in the arts and crafts devoted to domestic architecture. Scarcely a single painter of distinction among us has failed to absorb consciously or unconsciously some element of Oriental æstheticism. Already such men as Kiyonaga, Harunobu, Hokusai and Hiroshige have attained positions of international influence. These men anticipated the art of modern Europe and America and really founded the modern school of painting represented by the work of Manet, Monet, Renoir, Morisot, Degas.<sup>1</sup> The acknowledged purpose of these adventurous Frenchmen was to mirror the passing world, precisely as that had been the aim of the vagabond print-and-picture-book painters of the previous century in Japan. In each case the people were intensely alive and eager for some new phase of self-expression. Art then as the "sensitive barometer of the buoyancy of a nation's spirit" responded with the formation of an intensely individual and therefore national mode of expression. Two main ideas Japanese colour prints may be said to have taught Western Europe: (1) the passing show: how to represent the actual everyday

<sup>1</sup> The influence persists in the Post-Impressionist period starting anew with the arbitrary designs of Gauguin and Van Gogh, of Seurat and Lautrec, and renewing itself again with those more subjective followers of Degas and the Japanese, Steinlen, Bonnard, Vuillard, and even Marquet and Matisse. In America the union of Eastern and Western art is anticipated in the series of mystical decorations by Augustus Vincent Tack.

world and its ephemeral interests of passing light and life in various ways, concise, capricious, and suggestive; (2) the decorative technique: how to make effective and unexpected patterns with the simplest, least conventional means, emphasizing the numberless joys of colour schemes and arabesques, the expressive possibilities of line and mass, and most of all the value of surprises in picturesque invention. These ideas offered so refreshing a contrast to the rules of the academies that the modern European progressives seized upon them with avidity and from them developed their own sense of movement, of irregular space composition, of pure colours juxtaposed for freshness of open-air effect and of various decorative inventions and designs. Without Japanese prints there might never have been the most delightful phase of the art of Whistler, the modern German poster painters, and the school of French draughtsmen from Degas to Forain.

In Japanese prints are depicted the various occupations of the people at work and play, the multicoloured life of the streets of Yedo, the Geisha dance, the tragic actors, the cherry-blossom picnics by the side of the Sumida River, the tea-houses that rest the wanderer on his every pilgrimage over the Tokaido highway through the heart of old Japan; across rice fields, over round bridges, down groves of swaying bamboo or avenues of twisted pine. Harunobu was preëminently the colourist. His harmonies of apricot and green, and of ashy rose and steel blue, idealized his observations of middle-class life. Hokusai was also a great man for colour, perhaps his best arrangements



being dark blue, coral and apple green, and greenish blue and straw yellow. But he was even greater in his humorous representations of a very vivid life. With equal gusto he would sketch a busy day in a lumber yard, or four graceful girls leaning over a balcony enjoying the beauty of their sacred mountain Fujiyama. Kiyonaga's women were even more knowingly portrayed, with lines not only decorative, but suggestive of life and character. In one print three girls are peering through the barred window of an upper room, that is very dimly illumined, down upon a moonlit harbour and the red lights flickering on distant ships. But it is Hiroshige who most influenced modern Europe with his valuable ideas for a decorative type of realistic painting. He loved to sketch from great heights and at far distances, and he succeeded admirably in his aërial perspective. He dared to attempt suggesting all sorts of weather — for instance, the downpours of summer rain, the fairyland of winter snowflakes, the stiff wind that bends the tree-tops and baffles the progress of pedestrians, the tranquil afterglow on the horizon, the witchery of moonlight, even the glow of paper lanterns, with cast shadows. In one of my favourite prints water-buffalo are depicted hauling bales of rice through a mountain village at twilight. The colour scheme is a delicious one, warm blue, ivory, and chocolate. Although the subjects of the prints were taken from life, yet the primary object was ever held to be decoration, and the colours were generally fantastic. To Oriental decorators belongs the credit for the blue trees and red mountains of modern



painting. However naturalistic the scenes depicted by such men as Hiroshige, their wholly arbitrary selections and arrangements of colour and line reveal their appreciation of the truth that pictorial art is, after all, only a decorative convention.

At the Paris Exposition of 1875 Japanese art made a profound sensation. Everything Japanese was declared fascinating and Western painters promptly attempted to transmit the exotic charms into their own work. Many of them succeeded admirably in acquiring the piquant, pictorial mannerisms of Toyokuni and Hiroshige, but, though ever so charming, their "Japaneseries" need not be taken too seriously. To sum up, Japan was directly responsible for the modern art of decorative illustration, and it taught modern Europe many lessons in art, especially the importance of suggestive singleness of surprising, fanciful effect. It is, however, to artists who never imitated Japanese methods that I turn for the best illustration of their beneficent guidance, to the men who, without concessions to any foreign influence far or near, sought to mirror the passing world even as Hokusai had done in old Japan. And so I speak not of Degas nor of Whistler, but of Renoir, who, better even than Manet and Monet, translated the very spirit of Ukiyo into nineteenth-century Parisian. As Camille Mauclair expressed it — "The race speaks through Renoir." He was the most French of all painters — French in his epicurean sensuousness and in his quaint, wholehearted, unhesitating abandon. From the voluptuousness of Boucher's flesh-tones and the fantastic

playfulness of Watteau's subjects, though regardless of their melancholy, even from Chardin's delight in the colour, the shapes, and the textures of homely and familiar objects arranged in space, and from the distinction, the *style* that ennobled the work of all these masters, Renoir inherited the racial taste and talent for expressing his own pleasant sense of life's vivacity. At the Luxembourg we cannot fail to linger as fascinated spectators of the open-air dance Renoir saw and recorded on the heights of Montmartre. These men and girls are making the most of their holiday, frolicking like children in the sunlight. For it is undeniable that however vulgar a crowd they may really have been, it was as happy children that Renoir chose to represent them, the hot light filtering through the leaves, checkering the ground with blue shadows, and all the air seeming to vibrate to the eye surcharged with heat and dust and the whirling rhythms of the dancing. There is a lot going on, to be sure, but the painter attempts no story-telling, determined only to impress us with his own vivid impression of the moment depicted, that one moment's impression of life's dizzy joyousness. We neither see these people with any clearness nor do we judge them with any seriousness. The mood is only one of colour, of emerald greens and strong enamelled blues and coral pinks blurred by a sense of heat and movement. Well, that is a very personal summer mood of the Parisians. The race indeed speaks through Renoir in such pictures.

But to become really familiar with the man one must go to the Durand-Ruel private collection in the

rue de Rome. There we partake of his infectious good-humour, his exhilarating vitality, his gaily coloured outbursts of rapture over modern life, his delight in pretty girls on view at the opera or loafing on a sunlit terrace, his affection for two children at their piano lessons, the pleasure he takes in the company of some men and women lunching up the river on a hot holiday, the fitful breeze flapping the awnings and the general discussion becoming of more importance than the dessert.<sup>1</sup> Anything, everything, gave Renoir inspiration for the production of rich, shimmering colours. The more difficult the subjects he attempted, the more insolently easy the way he mastered them. In later years he painted landscapes, nude figures and flowers just for the sake of the arbitrary colour chords and low reliefs of form he could make out of them. His is the luxurious spirit of romantic comedy, and back of all its former classic and its recent scientific detachment of vision, such is also the real artistic spirit of the French Nation.

But no national art can be summed up in the work of any one man, and Renoir's pictures of the passing show no more justly and comprehensively represent France than Japan is represented by the Ukioye of Hokusai. Every national art is a composite of the art of its most sincere and racially typical artists, the men who see and feel as see and feel the majority of their compatriots. In Oriental, European, even in British

<sup>1</sup> The reference here is to "Le Déjeuner des Canotiers," now in the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington.

art, there is a certain outstanding quality that enables us to recognize the æsthetic taste and talent of the various nations. It would be a fascinating study to consider at length the relation of a country's social, intellectual and commercial life to the character of its artistic expression. One could reason out, for example, just how, from their predominant literature, the British have come to desire household sentiments and literary allusions and poetic symbolism in their pictures, and how, from familiarity with their own climate, they have developed their fine feeling for cloud effects in landscape; how the Spaniards have been true, with a few distinguished exceptions, to their traditions of sombre tones and dramatic subjects with sensational features; how the French are quick to respond to a subtlety of sensation or emotion, conscious always of a sanctity in Tradition, in Order and Authority, but alive no less to the need for changes of style in art, changes calculated to correspond with the changes of taste and the developments of civilization; how, to name but one more nation, the Germans are forever Germans, coarse, fantastic, self-reliant, most successful with posters that arrest the eye with broad masses of startling but effective colour, fond of romantic suggestions of native life and legend, with old castles and mediæval house-tops and dark forests infested by weird animals, given over to nightmare "expressionism," and to sexual fantasies more or less adapted to the age and its idioms.

It is also easy to recognize modern Scandinavian, Belgian and Dutch paintings. The Norwegian painter



Edward Munch corresponds to the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen in his gloomy psychological solicitude. Every nation seems to cling to its national pictorial heritage. But how is it with America? On all sides we hear that America is polyglot, that no national art is possible in a country which never had any real infancy, in a civilization transplanted full grown from foreign lands, in a community peopled by all races and persistently alien. Much of all this is true, just as it is also true that whatever we have had to learn over again about art, after we cut ourselves adrift from Mother England, we learned from the Italians, the Germans, the Dutch, the French and the Spanish. But something also we have gained from our own observations and experiences, and that something has been national character, a national way of seeing and feeling and thinking. What we have learned from abroad has been merely technical. What we have developed for ourselves has been inspirational. In the short space of little more than two generations we have produced a pictorial art endowed with a brighter promise for the future than the art of any other nation in the world at the present time.

American art *did* have its period of infancy. It is very true that the culture of the ages might earlier have been acquired for the asking. But with a new continent of quite overpowering immensity to develop, and a freshly won independence from the old world, and a great ocean between, it is little wonder that our early American artists shared the general opinion that culture was of less importance than com-



merce and the more substantial comforts of self-made civilization. The pioneer and the settler, the frontiersman and the backwoodsman — these men all unwittingly stamped the consciousness of the early American artists with their own crude thoughts and brave spirits. Art was not yet understood to be an accessory to the joy of living. Such a conception would have been regarded as effeminate and foreign. Art was dimly supposed to be an expression of man's feeling in the presence of Nature's vastness. Just as the dreamy schoolboy writes a poem on the Mountain of Life, and in attempting to explain the universe, reveals his young mind bare and fallow, all the ignorance and the reverence and the expectant wonder of it, so the early American painter stood on a mountain-top and painted the glorious panorama as far as his eye could see. Perhaps he became as philosophical and allegorical as the schoolboy. Perhaps he tried to get everything into his picture, to account for every leaf on the trees of the farthest horizon. It was all very bad painting and not to be considered art at all. Nevertheless it was also very young and promising. The great American school of landscape painting grew out of this beginning. Such men as Martin, Fuller, Inness, Wyant, Homer and Eakins passed through their period of primitive æsthetic excitement before they attained to their clear comprehension of art as unity of expression. American painters to-day have become cosmopolitan but not eclectic. They are thoroughly national. The American old masters pointed the way and they have followed them.

Winslow Homer saw his opportunity on the coast of Maine. There he lived the life of a hermit, responding to the ocean's every mood, thrilling to the epic of man and the elements, the age-long conflict of the rocks and the waves. The Gloucester fishermen on their reeling decks, in fog and storm and shine; their life of danger on the treacherous sea; their womenfolk on the rocky purple headlands, straining their eyes into the threatening distance for the first glimpse of the fleet's home-coming; — these elemental things Homer knew how to make soul-stirring. And Inness, with the heart of a poet and a genius for colour, saw into the very soul of American landscape; saw the scarlet and gold of its maple trees in the haze of Indian summer, the dramatic life of its skies when storms reverberate in the hills, the opulence of its wide harvest-fields, the desolation of its waste places, the glory of sunset transfiguring its meadows, the mellow poetry of moonrise beyond the warm, sweet gloom of its fragrant pine groves of the south. Buoyancy of normal healthful spirit, free from too much constraint of tradition, and combined with a natural frankness, and an eloquent enthusiasm, and an ardent love of life, these are the qualities which Homer and Inness inherited from their primitive ancestors and handed on to the American painters of the present day.

Upon this firm foundation of national character has now been laid much culture and technical training from abroad. Small men indeed have become eclectic with overmuch knowledge and insufficient inspiration.

But the larger men have recognized the need of recording our own life and landscape with our own sense of beauty and of truth. Our painters excel with colour and in the creation of effects of atmosphere. Although we make haste slowly, we are none the less progressive in our art. We are apt to follow the styles of Paris instead of inventing our own, but all that is, as yet, to be expected. American taste is chiefly characterized by its moderation, its modification and even refinements upon the good technical ideas originated in the studios of Europe. I am thinking of the spiritualized impressionism of Weir and Twachtman. Loving excitement all too well, and demanding to be kept in a state of constant surprise, it is true that we even enjoy being shocked. And yet our artists have both the time and the patience for subtleties and delicacies that do not shout for our attention amid the bewilderments of our modern life. And even this love of excitement is well enough if we look at it from the proper philosophical distance. We are really far more sensation-loving than sensational. People who are really turbulent and lawless are seeking notoriety because life bores them. That is true of many of the European Post-Impressionists. They are suffering from ennui, from a consequent desire to kick over the traces. There is absolutely none of this dangerous element in the American character. On the contrary, we love life so much that we have not yet acquired the repose and the well-poised detachment needful for contemptuously disregarding what is worthless and seeking out only what is best. In art we express altogether too

much, but our expression is at least invariably honest and inspired by genuine enthusiasm.

Everything points to the coming of an American Renaissance — our mingling of races, our material prosperity, our wonderland of natural beauties, our steel mills and skyscrapers fit for glorious decorations, our eagerness of invention, our buoyancy of spirit, our contact with Nature's big thoughts and big emotions in mountain, prairie, harbour and forest, our moulding of the elements to our purpose in swamp, desert, quarry and mine. Not only does America inherit the arts of all races and of all ages, but rich should be the harvesting and exquisite the flowering of the strong, sound and aspiring American spirit from the seeds of æsthetic purpose, now so wisely and so bountifully being sown in her own native soil.

## VI

### THE CITY IN PAINTING AND ETCHING

(1912)

ONE of the most propitious signs of our artistic awakening may be recognized in our new acknowledgment of elements pictorial and even poetic in the modern city. It is difficult for us to relinquish a notion that the world of industry and commerce is an ugly and prosaic one. Now we are called upon to see in this same ugliness something positively beautiful. And we do begin to see it. We begin to see that the city reveals the character of an epoch and that the spirit of our modernity is, at least, the most appropriate thing for us to express. Art is mere artifice unless it is the response of a genuine impulse, a genuine need that has compelled its creation. And architecture is merely the name we give to the task of planning how best in the construction of our buildings we may make beauty serve utility in accord with the eternal fitness of things. The skyscraper rose higher and higher on our streets, not aspiring to be beautiful but to be useful, to solve the problem of how to raise a huge edifice on a small plot of valuable land. This imperious invasion of upper air for the purposes of extending business seems to us now from our present vantage-point something titanic and typical of our time. Yet ten years ago we never looked at the skyscraper to admire it, nor conceived the thought



that under sun-flushed morning mist, or the slant sunset light, it might be, in a rare and stirring way, a thing of beauty. Now we are all ready to stand sponsor for this new American architecture which is so sincere and original, and we are all willing to acknowledge in its appearance not only something inherently picturesque, but unconsciously symbolical. And so, more in America perhaps than in any other country, the townscape has become a very formidable rival of the landscape in painting and in other pictorial arts.

Now that the city is such a favourite subject for representation in pictures it is interesting to trace the beginning of the painter's responsiveness to the æsthetic possibilities of streets and buildings. If space permitted we could speculate upon the influence that prompted Ambrogio Lorenzetti to fresco an upper room in the beautiful townhall of Siena with his delectable view of a mediæval city prospering under good government. Giotto had supplied the realistic impetus. But here the life, not of Christ, but of the average man within the grim brick battlements, was apprehended as material for pictures. Later we could speak of that gay romancer, Carpaccio. There is a fascination about the pageants he portrayed and their setting, the shimmering lagoons, the semi-Oriental towers and domes. Something of the fabulous glory of Venice in her day of pomp and power may be imagined. In the later period of her diminished importance she retained her proud beauty, but it is the more subtle appeal of faded splendour that

Canaletto and Guardi immortalized in the eighteenth century. Very exquisitely did they paint for us the essential Venetian charms; delicate and yet sprightly colours; stately waterways traversed by ghostly gondolas; marble bridges and stairways; graceful balconies and loggias — all beneath that faint, long-lingering sunshine which, in gracious melancholy, is so like our Venice that remains.

These two painters responded to different phases of Venetian beauty. Canale for instance sought a clear and golden light, the general air of radiant well-being that envelops such deep architectural perspectives as the Grand Canal curving down to the Rialto. Guardi, on the other hand, loved the pearly and mist-laden air and was sensitive to such passing impressions as impending rain, voyaging clouds, shadows falling across the house-tops of the Piazza, little animated figures catching the high-lights of the sun. Canale's style was a lucid and substantial prose, Guardi's a subtle and fragile poetry. But the earlier master, too, could extol his city in lyric fashion. In London's National Gallery there is a superb example of this impassioned realism. The evening shadows are gradually darkening the green waters of a small canal where gondolas lie black and motionless. The recesses, too, of a stately church on the farther shore are already immersed, only the soaring bell-tower still glowing against the rich blue sky. The foreground is in a glory of golden light that seems to pour through the frame of the picture. Stone-carvers are finishing their work in and around a wooden shanty. Doubtless

it is the wife of one of them who plays with her babies while from an upper window a servant chats with her. The house on the extreme right has walls of peeling rose-red plaster. These walls together with the arched balcony, the flowers and curtains of the windows, gleam transfigured in the radiant light. This is a vision of the long day's happiest hour.

In Holland, painters had earlier learned to look about them for subjects, and many are the Dutch townscapes. Pieter de Hooghe with his doors and windows opening on canals and courtyards, the sunlight streaming in, creates just the genial, shut-in sentiment of city life. His homes are delightful, but the mind only needs his suggestions of brick walls and ampler air outside, to go a-wandering into the winding ways of seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Vermeer painted two city pictures and they are visions of entrancing loveliness. In his celebrated "View of Delft," the very textures of roofs and walls and steeples are imitated with grainy pigment, and the illusion of mellow evening sunshine is truly miraculous. But in all this triumphant naturalism there is nothing literal. As also in the little street scene of the Six Collection the foliage of the trees is of a most delicious blue. And through all the singing colour harmony there is a pervading sentiment of dreamful quiet resting upon the little town and its pale canal; the peace and joy of all the golden evenings that ever were. Never since Vermeer painted this enchanting canvas has the evanescent effect of glowing sunlight and lengthening shadows over walls of solid masonry

produced a result so lyrical. Van der Heyden was a more literal soul. His many admirable views of Dutch towns are full of interest but devoid of charm, and are painted with the detailed laboriousness of a Gerard Dou. However, for devoting his life and art to the depiction of the city — the first painter really to appreciate the possibilities of the genre — he deserves great credit.

From the Dutch streets and canals of Van der Heyden to similar subjects in a radically different style by G. H. Breitner is a long leap, but in the intermediate two hundred years there are no noteworthy examples of successful townscape painting. Breitner is one of the stenographic impressionists bent on rapidly recording instantaneous effects. He either paints scenes of violent activity on the Rotterdam and Amsterdam docks, or the brown-and-white, peak-gabled houses bordering the quiet canals of residential districts. His brushwork is extremely vigorous and he has a realist's sure instinct for strength of colour and atmospheric illusion. I remember one particularly incisive transcript of a winter evening in a Dutch town. The foreground is a snow-covered bridge in the all but complete darkness of early nightfall. One may dimly distinguish a few belated pedestrians hurrying through the chill gloom. The observer is at once inside of the picture, seeking the lighted shop windows of the middle distance. But his attention is diverted by the incident of a sullen glow of reddish light persisting in the western sky. Such work as this is a digression from the Dutch pictorial tradition which has



always laid more emphasis on surface beauty than strength and which has, in the nineteenth-century revival, tempered truth with sentiment. It is from Paris that Breitner's inspiration comes. There a school of specialists arose about 1860 — specialists in light and air, transient effects guaranteed, prosaic subjects selected by preference. The Paris of the theatres, the boulevard cafés, the public parks and bridges, offered them abundant opportunity for exciting experiments with conflicts and complexities of light. Manet, the *chef d'école*, depicted the bar at the Folies Bergères and an open-air concert in the Tuileries Gardens, both daring studies of the animation of crowds and of the reflections and refractions of colour. Monet painted the Gare Saint-Lazare just at the moment when a locomotive has rushed under the glazed dome. The smoke from the engine rises blue in the enclosed foreground and drifts away pink in the open sunlight beyond. Many years later in London this great painter did the best work of his career with such scenes as Waterloo Bridge in the blue of morning fog. The struggling sunlight tints with purest violet the murky sky and the ascending columns of smoke from factory chimneys, and violet reflections shimmer across the waters of the Thames. Pissarro, also, has painted London, although he is best known for his Parisian avenues with swarming crowds viewed from upper windows in various conditions of atmosphere such as wind and rain. To-day<sup>1</sup> Paris is best por-

<sup>1</sup> At the time this paper was written I had not made the acquaintance of Bonnard, Marquet and Utrillo — all of them artists of greater distinction than Raffaelli.



trayed by Raffaelli in paintings, etchings and lithographs. He emphasizes the vivacious pallor of the Champs Élysées, his sunshine there seeming ever faint and weary. He points with pride to the majesty of the Place de la Concorde and comments on the contrast of faces to be seen any summer's day on the Boulevard des Italiens. Each picture is a moment fraught with significance and eloquent with unspoken suggestion. Raffaelli knows his Paris.

It is the perennial answer of the artist when a critic complains that a picture is not thus and so — "I paint what I see." Exactly. But what an amazing variety there is to our human vision. For us who walk and drive about a city, catching enjoyable impressions that at the time are almost entirely optical and untroubled by any preconceptions of our own, the city means a series of more or less vivid sensations, of colour, atmosphere, architecture, and abundant light and life, all blurred by the incessant movement and the constantly altered perspective. It was thus, representing the average man on the average street, that Manet, Monet, Degas and Renoir purposed to paint their Paris. But while this coterie of clever naturalists were rapidly recording the kaleidoscopic city scene with purely objective absorption in facts, a half-starved, half-crazed genius was etching all the terror and the torment of his soul in once seen, never to be forgotten visions of old Paris; visions that affect the observer with a sense of something abnormal and yet familiar, sinister and yet bewilderingly beautiful. In one of Meryon's famous plates the sun beats with

pitiless glare upon the old Morgue and a haggard row of tall, white tenements huddled back of it. In the foreground a corpse is being carried up from the river — the scene sharply silhouetted against the white light on the gleaming stone parapet. But we do not need this touch of melodrama to accentuate the macabre impression. The old buildings of the background, drawn with the consummate art that conceals its wizardry, oppress the eye and the mind with mysterious glamour. Thus might we behold beauty in a feverish dream or in some hour of intolerable depression. Marvellous, too, is Meryon's vision of "Le Stryge," the horned and winged Demon that with tongue outthrust, from the northwest tower of Notre Dame, broods in lascivious thought and luxurious satisfaction over Paris. To the depiction of this monster of mediæval fantasy, Meryon brought his own haunted imagination. Birds of prey swoop under the towers, and in the black shadows of the streets below evil secrets are in the air, crime might well be lurking around any corner. Joseph Pennell relates that once when he was sketching up among these eerie gargoyles he was surprised by the arrival of Whistler. The great painter had not, however, toiled up the painful stairway merely to enjoy the view. In fact he soon became nervous and restless among the strange demons, and was obviously unhappy until they were completely out of his sight and mind. This incident throws an important light on Whistler's real taste and temperament. He hated the grotesque and acutely resented the abnormal and the sensational. The city was to

him a perpetual inspiration and the poetry of Nature which most painters go seeking in woods and fields, he could find in London. But only when it is dusk or night, when there is a flush in the gloaming or when the lamps are lit across the river and the blue, mysterious world glimmers far and near with sparks of gold. That he preferred the gentle illusions of an enchanted darkness to the staring obviousness of the day is not surprising, but what may be at first disconcerting is that he carried this preference for intangible and inexplicable qualities to his choice of subjects. Although his dreams were expressed in simple terms of unmistakable reality — the atmosphere of his Nocturnes being truth itself — yet he never emphasized his observation. Just to show that the less there is to see, the more there is to feel, his carefully coloured wood panels and absorbent canvases were often undisturbed by any but the most tentative suggestions of form. And he invariably selected for depiction, both in painting and etching, not the far-famed sights of cities, but curiously casual bits that revealed his own discrimination; Venetian doorways and London fruit-stalls and suburban warehouses — remarkably unremarkable subjects about which he alone could say beautiful things and by the delicacy of his sight and touch convert the substance of prose into the essence of poetry. A living artist, Frank Brangwyn, is a powerful personality for whom the visible world is fraught with rich romance that is largely of his own making — a romance that he finds in the bridges and markets and wharves of London

no less than in the mediæval guild-houses of Ghent and the domed mosques of the Orient. True individualists then can easily make their townscapes expressive of themselves — of the shape and colour of their own minds, the key and tone of their own moods.

Before etchings of cities by Meryon, Whistler and Brangwyn we do not think of the cities depicted but of the artists themselves, the appeal of their individual style and of their original personalities. Before etchings of cities by Joseph Pennell, however, we instinctively exclaim as we glance hurriedly through a portfolio or around the walls of an exhibition — that is Paris, Chartres, Canterbury, London, New York, Pittsburgh. Each print is a portrait of the place it represents and a portrait full of the racial and the national as well as the local character of the subject. Pennell's Spanish cities are as unmistakably Spanish as his American cities are American. It is as easy for him to render the essential Castilian quality of Toledo on the Tagus as it would be for him to state all that is true of Ohio and at the same time picturesque in Toledo, the American town. He has sketched and etched in many lands and in each place, whether city or village, he has said just the right thing — no more, no less. Provided a place has a character of its own he will seize upon it and do it justice. If there is a possibility of poetic suggestion he will make the most of it.<sup>1</sup> If it is merely a matter of fact he will resort to

<sup>1</sup> This is hardly true. Pennell was an illustrator and if he made the most of anything it was from that point of view, in search merely for the picturesque. He was original neither in vision nor in method, but did conceive his industrial motifs in a big way and never failed to respond



no mock heroics but will state the case with the learned strokes of a pencil or an etching needle, never at a loss to execute his intention — to reproduce exactly what his responsive mind and eye have selected as artistic and significant. His pictures of New York skyscrapers are perhaps the summit of his achievement. They have genuinely thrilled him, these Towers of Babel, these incredible dream castles that are as real as their steel and stone construction and as symbolical of our national character as anything that a poet's imagination could have devised. In some of Pennell's views of the skyline from the river the tall buildings stand all spectral and fantastic in the misty morning light. In others, we feel the height and bulk and clamour of the business districts during rush hours with a sense of overwhelming actualities. Childe Hassam is another artist of objective vision who can record with exceptional skill the pictorial inspiration of our mighty cities. He has painted down-town New York with a virile and a facile brush, painted the spire of Old Trinity dwarfed by the encircling hosts of steel-ribbed giants, painted Wall Street, seen from above, in whose bottommost depths we note the frenzied ground whirl of humanity. Likewise the jagged silhouette of gaunt buildings on the waterfront he has portrayed under many conditions of atmosphere, and alike in the crystalline transparency of an autumn morning and the golden haze of a summer evening — the charm is irresistible. Then, with emotion to the lower New York skyline which he saw, every day of his last years in America, from his windows in Brooklyn.

D. P., 1926



too, he has rendered with Monet's spots and splashes the momentary impressions of rainy nights in the theatre district. The blurred lights, the hurrying crowds under wet umbrellas, the glistening pavements, we see them all, not in detail but in that swift, all-pervasive sense when the hurried glance rests upon nothing in particular but takes in everything in general. In others of his city scenes he will present the proud pageant of Fifth Avenue on Sunday mornings or perhaps some side street in the grip of a mid-winter's evening. The snow lies deep and soggy in drifts and furrows, reflecting on the pavements the dim illumination from the lamp-posts, while the more genial light from within the houses only accentuates the outer chill and gloom. Cornoyer expresses by preference the quiet mood that may be fostered even amid the unrest and the uproar by such a sight as Madison Square on a damp, dark afternoon, trees and streets slick with soft moisture, and the outlines of tall buildings in the distance lost in the gloom of low-lying clouds. Then there is the mood of excitement so true to the dweller in cities.<sup>1</sup> Bellows, Luks, Myers, Shinn, Sloan, Glackens, Beal, Coleman, and many others have essayed it — the excitement of little children of the East Side tenements dancing around a grind-organ, or the excitement of fire-engines

<sup>1</sup> New York has been such a rich mine of inspiration to American and to visiting European "Modernists" that a book could be written on this subject. I will only mention the fascinating abstractions based on skyscrapers, street cañons, elevated railroads, etc., by Stella, Marin, Walkowitz, Sheeler, Hirsch, Nevinson and Georgia O'Keefe.

in the dark, or of cigarettes after dinner on a downtown roof garden in the summer starlight, with searchlights playing from the harbour, and deep below the twinkling illumination of the streets. Such scenes are as yet too real to yield us illusions. But the sense of their romance will grow. And what seems fascinating to us even now in views of skyscrapers and steel mills and harbour commerce and street traffic — with what new glamour shall they be invested when the eyes of future ages behold in them the true likeness of great American cities in the glorious days of the Republic. And not merely the show and the substance of them shall be known but also their significance. And the measure of historical importance that shall dignify those pictorial representations of cities shall in the end be identical with the measure of their importance as art. For only in so far as they can convey to the beholder the sense of visual impressions, not merely seen but felt, of moments vividly experienced, and then, by the ordered magic of mind and hand, transferred to canvas and paper — can they make what are but realistic observations for us, romantic visions for our children's children.

## VII

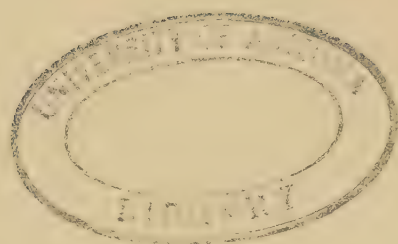
### VELASQUEZ — “THE ENCHANTER OF REALISM”

(1912)

EDMONDO DE AMICIS, in his book on Spain, confessed that he stopped at the entrance to the Prado Gallery in Madrid to ask himself, with fast-beating heart, what good he had ever done in life to deserve the wonderful joy that was in store for him. I remember how I laughed at the emotional Italian. Yet, when I stood on the threshold of the great Velasquez room, and beheld out of the corners of my eye the masterpieces of the supreme master of modern painting, something of the same emotion came to me. I expected so much that I feared disillusionment, I braced myself for the shock. But the precaution was unnecessary. It was almost better than the banquet — that preliminary relish I took of general impression. I seemed to be in the midst of a stately, gloomy life, at least two centuries behind the times, and yet as real to me as the present, and far more vivid. For suddenly I experienced an endowment with exceptional powers, so that I could see the intense *beauty of truth* and of all truthful appearances, as if for the first time. Chardin, it is true, had given me moments of similar delight, with his little pictures of blue and yellow grapes, blue and creamy crockery, peaches,



MOENIPPUS  
*By Velasquez*





red wine, gray walls and copper kettles, all suffused with the magic of real light and inspired observation. And, of course, I had raved over many a Frans Hals, the bloom of a plump cheek, the kindling laughter of an eye. But Chardin's touch idealized and Hals's brush improvised. It is Velasquez alone who realized reality and left it more real than he found it. Not a face, nor a hand, nor a background but was literally true. I found very little beauty in the commonly accepted sense of the word in that Velasquez room at the Prado. I found chiefly men, women and children, of the unmistakable Iberian cast, with which I was already familiar; arid brown plains and broad blue distances, such as may be seen from the car window to-day as one approaches Madrid; glimpses of rooms seen dimly at first behind figures of a period when dress was particularly bad, and people, dreary people, either of royal blood, or satellites of the sombre Court, from the arrogant Prime Minister to the piteous dwarfs, idiots and buffoons who supplied the amusement when time dragged wearily within the musty walls. Only a Court painter then was this Velasquez — a person who painted pictures to order as the tailor produced liveries. And yet, as I looked from portrait to landscape, from a great decorative battle scene to a greater representation of things as they once appeared, I knew that I was face to face with the mystery of genius — that compound of "original seeing, intellectual courage and some gift or other of expression," that genius of eyesight which enables us to see things as we never could have seen

them before, and to find beauty where we did not know that beauty could exist.

It is commonly supposed that to appreciate Velasquez one must be either a painter or a special student of painting, that since there is so little beauty of subject to be found, the beauty must be entirely in the way the things are done, in short, in the technique. This is indeed true. Velasquez is the modern painter's painter, and the paragon of all the virtues which the more enlightened art schools teach. Yet, these virtues are not just for the emulation of the few. They make for the larger life of the many. To demand that pictorial art should be altogether subject or altogether sentiment, but without style, is the same thing as to expect a man to be altogether body or altogether spirit, but without that mind which alone can make the body and spirit effective. Some people overlook technique, because they consider it too material. Yet, as Stevenson was fond of repeating, "Without matter there would be no stuff in which imagination could create an image." A picture without distinction of visual, structural, or technical character, is like a man whose natural powers of body and spirit have been rendered helpless by sheer lack of mental discipline. Whether we care to admit it or not, art implies technique, which simply means the method of doing a thing well. Of course, no matter how well a thing may be done, it must be done with a joy and a purpose, otherwise it will not be worth doing. If that zest were really lacking in Velasquez, we could hold him responsible for the soulless virtuosity practiced

in the name of "Art for Art's Sake." But this is not true. It was because this artist loved life's actualities with a love surpassing that of the idealist that he was not only able to depict things truthfully, but with a beauty that belonged to his own mind and soul. Velasquez was neither unemotional nor even impersonal. On the contrary, he was a reverential devotee of Nature and her secrets. He insisted upon going to Nature with an open mind — free from formulas and preconceptions. His idea of pictorial beauty was not to make an arbitrary design to improve upon Nature, but rather, through powers of personal discrimination and discernment, to select from Nature the forms and colours of our visible world itself, the sights that are so inevitable a part of our waking existence, and which may be so indispensable a part of our inner consciousness.

Although "Las Meninas" is the most wonderful realistic picture in the world, we may prefer the more sumptuous and splendid "Las Lanzas," better known as "The Surrender of Breda." This picture bridges the gap between the decorative realm of Italy and Rubens, and the nineteenth-century art of Constable and Corot, of Courbet and Manet. Velasquez was demonstrating that magnificence of pictorial decoration could be made without falsifying the scene represented. Such is the power of suggestion, when expressed by a great artist's selection of only what is significant, that the action or arrangement of the few figures and horses on this conspicuous hill-top, the glimpses we get of the distant battlefields and its smouldering fires, the

hedge of pikes and lances held at rest, these details satisfy the mind at a glance of the exact situation between the two armies. Some of the soldiers of the foreground stare at us with disconcerting curiosity, but the chief actors in the scene are intent upon the business in hand, rather anxious to have it over with, this ceremony so trying to both conquered and conqueror. We admire the sense of impulsive magnanimity with which Spinola receives the key of the city. The story then is clearly and attractively told, and yet the purpose of the picture is purely and frankly decorative. Note the arabesque of lances against the sky, the landscape stretching miles and miles, the dull red of the soil steeped in a veil of bluish atmosphere, the pattern of flat colour masses, green, orange, chestnut, buff and black. See the canvas from the proper distance and no Titian will seem to you more rich in colour and design. So I say, we may prefer "Las Lanzas" to "Las Meninas" and to every other picture in the world. But it is not the essential Velasquez. It is a splendid compromise with Italy and Rubens, and the Master is immortal, just because he usually made no such concessions, because he relied implicitly upon his own eyesight and philosophy.

Turn then to "Las Meninas" and let the picture work its will with you. Here is no colour scheme — no balancing of lines and masses. You may be prepared to find fault with this picture, because the subject is not concentrated as is customary in the middle plane; because the figures are pushed out to the immediate foreground, and in accentuated light, with



darkness above and beyond. Perhaps, according to the schools, you are right; but soon you will be willing to admit that Velasquez was greater than the schools. He knew how to make that empty vaulting and the gloomier recesses of the dark room say just what he wanted most to say. It was thus and thus only that he could give the exact "*flavour* of his impression." This picture was to be a poem on the subdued splendour of *real light*, as it appears indoors. Real light dictated the point of view, dominated the colour and the composition. It is the mystery of real light which makes the harmonious ensemble of this and every other great Velasquez, fusing the colours, modelling the forms, creating the exact thrill of the original impression.

In "Las Meninas" the daylight enters gently at the window across the group of figures. It blurs a little the figure of the dwarfed woman, who is not only in strong light but out of focus. For, of course, it is the dainty royal child upon whom we look, as she stands with inborn dignity among her attendants. The full light from the window makes the sunward rim of the big canvas shine, the unseen picture upon which Velasquez has depicted himself at work. Note, too, how the panelled door at the far end of the room reflects the light from beyond, thus lengthening the aerial perspective. But the parts in shadow, they are the real miracle; the high and empty spaces where nothing stands out, and yet everything may be seen, as our eyes become accustomed to the gloom; where the air is unobtrusive, as always in a shadowy place,



yet permeating, circulating. "We feel," writes John Hay in "Castilian Days," "like walking to the side of the painter to see how his portrait is coming on." The illusion is startling, an illusion somehow of aspects and effects, almost *subconsciously familiar*. The more we look, the more we forget art and stand in the midst of life. That is art's triumph — to make us acknowledge that out of the dead past a moment has been made to live again. No romantic dream, though ever so mellifluous, could charm us with so sure a charm, the charm of a severely plain and darkened room as it appeared once just for a moment, with just a moment's accident of transitory light, of unpremeditated action and arrangement, and of natural colour. How could the romance of reality be better demonstrated for all to see, than by this record of a casual observation, converted into a thing of transcendent beauty by the sheer æsthetic impressionability of a single human vision?

Of the master's brush-work it is easy to become ecstatic and lose one's sense of art's relative values. His dexterity was amazing, and his mastery of his materials greater than that of any painter before or since. Hals was also a magician of the brush, but he was a specialist, like our one-sided painters of to-day. Such versatility as Velasquez reveals at the Prado must make us all very humble. Beginning with a hard realism which aimed at nothing more than the imitation of objects and the character of a face, or a figure, he learned quickly how to eliminate and simplify for the sake of a single effect. Each head in

"Los Borrachos" is such a masterpiece of characterization that our attention passes from part to part and fails to remember the picture as a whole. Velasquez learned in time that an impressionistic portrait group is an impossibility. Here we get an impression, it is true, an impression of the dazed way these besotted peasants are staring at us, from eyes all stark with drink. But that was not the essential impression. We have lost the picture in appreciation of the parts. Then the painter undertook his first visit to Italy, and the decorative pictures and equestrian portraits with landscape backgrounds are the result. During this period, Velasquez became a spirited sketcher of atmospheric effects. The equestrian portrait of Balthasar Carlos is almost lyrical; so rhythmic and fresh is it in colour and spirit, so true to the mood of winsome boyhood, and the physical joy of a gallop when, on a spring morning, the wind is racing from the hills. The colours sparkle. The silver of the cloud-shine and of the light on the snowy summits enlivens the melody made by the brisk hoofs of the comical barrel-shaped pony, and the pink and gold sash of the little prince as it flies in the breeze. With such adventures in art Velasquez was training his eye for the slashing and rippling, flowing and flowering brush-stroke of his later days. And he was also anticipating the decorative harmonies of colour with which he interpreted the charm of children. The "Infanta" of the Louvre is a simple chord of coral pink, black and pearl. At Vienna we enjoy the same little girl dressed in salmon pink and standing against a curtain of

robin's egg blue. The "Maria Theresa" of the Prado is a brilliant improvisation in tints of strawberry and silver. The sparkle of the braid and the filmy transparency of the lace handkerchief reveal an unerring lightness and a debonair certainty of touch.

But the most wonderful portrait from the standpoint of the virtuoso is the "Pope Innocent" of the Doria Palace, Rome. The sheen of the cape is brushed in swirls of purple and pink that only a genius would have dared to reveal as the hollows and high-lights of crimson silk. Tintoret and Greco influenced this cape, and Titian may be detected in the wonderful grainy white which, in a large way, imitates the fringes of heavy lace of the prelate's skirt. But only Velasquez could have modelled the face, modelled it in full, uncompromising light, thus capturing that furtive look of sinister calculation; the expression of a hard man hoarding dark thought. R. A. M. Stevenson, in his invaluable commentary upon Velasquez, said that the only key to the secret of the master's modelling was "the brushing of the obvious direction of the forms so as to supplement tone and structure by the sentiment of the execution." I am particularly pleased by this phrase "the sentiment of the execution." Elaborating the thought, he insists that Velasquez never used style for its own sake. "His composition was never a pattern forced upon Nature. His drawing was not an effort to realize abstract contours. His colour was not the harmony of positive tints understood by a milliner. His brush was constantly changing with his impressions, as the

tones of a man's voice vary with his emotions. Thus in 'Philip IV Old' no brush-work is visible as befits an illusion of flesh closely seen in strong light. His modelling not only changes character with the amount of light, but with the size of the canvas, the width or narrowness of the field of view, and the position near or far from the focus of impression."

"Las Hilanderas" is an example of the perfection of human sight and reproductive skill. We stand among the spinners in the dark workroom of the Royal Manufactory of Tapestries. As in "Las Meninas," the upper air is steeped in gloom. But here the eye is attracted by a view into the show-room where on the wall the dazzling daylight pours upon tapestries of rose, blue and silver, and upon the figures of fashionable ladies standing there. From this luminous background a single ray of light falls upon the exquisitely rounded neck and shoulders of a young girl in the centre of the workers. The shadows are deep enough to dim the faces and figures of the other women, but we can see (and almost hear) the whirring revolutions of the spinning wheel. The contrast then is of light and dark air, of colour and gloom, riches and poverty, luxury and toil, but all this felt rather than seen, in the dull way we *feel* things when, in real life, we are preoccupied by the moment's purely visual impression. The modern impressionism which aims at transitory effects of light and air has achieved no picture comparable to this, nor have I found a more interesting impression of the really significant facts of life, in any picture of the type



which depends upon interest of subject for success. Those who would find the complete Velasquez, the accurate and yet profoundly thoughtful observer of appearances, and the marvellous virtuoso of the brush can find him in this picture. It may be less pleasing than "Las Lanzas" and less perfect than "Las Meninas," but it is, I repeat, the complete Velasquez, and therefore, needless to say, one of the most important pictures in the world.

Of his more personal moods, the beggars, dwarfs, and buffoons are perhaps the best expression. They speak his mind about the beauty of the homeliest truths, if eyes know how to see. Free from Court dictation, the artist was free to use the utmost freedom in his satirical conceptions and technical experiments. The old fellow named Æsop is painted with a gusto and a bravura which surpass Hals, and without his slashing. The face is that of a street-corner philosopher, resigned to life, and soon to be done with it, inclined to be tolerant with adversity, and tolerant too with his own rather worthless self, yet crackling like a tongue of fire among dead leaves with a dry, crisp humour. "Mœnippus" too is an odd "character" treated with playful satire and inspired fancifulness of execution. In fact he seems to me the inspiration of everything Whistler ever did in portraiture. Velasquez was here insisting that bright colours are not essential to decoration. Take an old quaint beggar, with the wild, jolly look of a man who talks with wit unbecoming his years, such a fellow will do if you place him on narrow, upright canvas



that sets off his gaunt figure. The black cloak will not be too sombre nor the brown slouch hat too dull for this decorative panel. Tilt the head back a little, just to catch the pale light, which will mellow the dusty black of the cloak and brown of the hat as it skims the enveloping darkness, and reveals the depths of air around and beyond. By a perfect handling of "values," and a magic of smudgy touch, Velasquez has left the empty spaces full of air and the homely textures eloquent of form.

Already I have said more than enough about the "Enchanter of Realism," for Stevenson's book is the last word on the subject. However, I would advise you to forget everything you have read, and to take the first opportunity to discover Velasquez for yourself. You will never forget the experience. The Süd Express carries you in comfort from Paris to Madrid in twenty-two hours.

## VIII

### CHARDIN

(1915)

IT is the paradox of Chardin which puzzles us in attempting to estimate the importance of his achievement. All those who understand the qualities of supremely good painting invariably become noticeably exhilarated over the mere surface of a little masterpiece by this most subtle of "Little Masters." Of course, as also with Vermeer — it really isn't little work at all. It is big, bold painting by a knowing brush which left enduring beauties where it passed. And there is a big human feeling in it too, expended (more's the pity if you will) upon a kitchen or the corner of a sideboard. And the colour! Fresher, finer colour the world has never known. In the Louvre — Salle La Caze — the Chardins fascinate. From the sensual, sentimental, fashionable attractions of Greuze, Boucher, Nattier and the rest, one must return again and again to the mellow warmth of Chardin's peaches and the lustrous coldness of his grapes, to the depth of ruby wine in his old dusty bottle, and to the tender blue of his housekeeper's apron, to the rich brown of his kitchen tiles and the fiery gleam of his copper cauldron, more than anything else to the wonderful way the colours play together, catching each other's influence, all in the harmony of daylight so diffused as to mingle the various subtleties of tone.

And yet — there is good reason to check our enthusiasm and consider the man's limitations before we have exalted him to the highest rank. There remains a disturbing paradox about Chardin. Very curiously his choice of subjects reveals him as both the most humble and timid and as the most proud and independent of painters.

The French people have a word for the domestic routine which Chardin so persistently represented. When they speak of an *intérieur* they refer, not merely to the inside of a house but to the intimacy of a household. All his life Chardin was content to paint the *intérieur* of the *bourgeoisie*, the daily round of small concerns which make up the uneventful existence of the middle-class housekeeper. The home was so delightfully this artist's delight that he was spontaneously affectionate and personal in rendering the appearance of the mere walls and furniture. His empty rooms, whether they are neat or in disorder, are immediately suggestive of the persons who have just gone out and will soon return. Particularly we suspect Chardin of a sly passion for the pantry. To appreciate this amiable weakness one needs only to recall adventurous explorations of one's own childhood into the risky region of appetizing odours. I cannot be convinced that Chardin cared for Still Life only because of its paintable surfaces and textures. For all his sure sense of the *beauty* of truth, citizen Chardin was no æsthete — "the world well lost" for the sake of arbitrary "arrangements." Had he been a seeker after effects of abstract beauty he would no

doubt have followed Watteau's example and willingly furnished the world of fashion with flattering fantasies upon its Palace gardens and gowns of rare brocade. Instead we suppose that he associated Imagination in Art with the prevailing snobbery and artificiality of court life, against the standards of which, in his own unassuming way, he rebelled. Call him what you wished — he preferred to stay at home. Quite frankly there was all the beauty he needed right there. Voilà tout! He liked to paint *what* he pleased, and *as* he pleased, taking as long to do it as ever he chose. He liked to watch the small children on his street, so quaintly well behaved and yet so much absorbed in their own devices for killing time. He liked to amuse the good woman, his neighbour, by occasional raids upon her larder. What "Nature Morte" could he carry off this morning? A basket of peaches? No? He could have a few eggs and a slice of fried ham from last night's supper. "Bon!" that would do for his picture.

So easily satisfied for a subject! Surely it argues a lack of courage no less than a lack of imagination in the good man. But does it? Consider the æsthetic traditions and standards of the age and the city in which he lived and had to make a living. Did he supply a demand? Not he. He knew himself and he knew that lots of other people were like him. He depended upon eventually creating a demand for the sort of thing he could do. The Patricians were enslaving the artists, compelling them to refine upon their refinements, to celebrate their celebrity, to



A BOWL OF PLUMS  
*By Chardin*





idealize their amours. Because one had to make a living the artists made the best of their lot by painting just as well as the bad taste of their patrons permitted. After all there was so much that was picturesque and even personal about the Ovidian allegories and the Romanesque fantasies which were the fashion in pictures that their servitude was not as galling as it might have been. But Chardin apparently disliked "caprice" and realized his lack of imagination. He was not the kind of man who rebels conspicuously against authority or invents anything new and startling. He was not a rebel. He was a philosopher. He knew what he could do and what he couldn't — or wouldn't; it was the same thing. His young wife died four years after their marriage and left him alone with their child of three. His own wants — so simple, and his family — so small, was there any need to make money at the expense of one's sincerity? For him there was no use painting unless things were made to look natural. He would paint for his own class of people, scenes familiar to his life and theirs. Engravings could be made from them and sold cheap to everybody. People would be less dissatisfied if they could see beauty as he saw it all around them, as the Dutch people had learned to see it from their painters. For always there was the Dutch tradition back of Chardin. In our admiration for his courage and independence we must remember that if it had not been for the precedent established by the genius of Vermeer and Maes and Pieter de Hooghe, he might never have undertaken to paint at all.

And yet what really splendid courage it did require to be a Chardin in spite of all that was going on in Paris! — to be an artist and yet to renounce the dramatic world that survived Louis Quatorze, the gorgeous pageantry, the historic backgrounds, the mythical disguises, the portentous significance of poverty passing unnoticed to spare the pride of pomp: to renounce all this for the look of little shadowy rooms where the light came in so softly, where everything happened from day to day just as everything had happened long before these children of the painter's brush were born, one day exactly like its neighbours, familiar ways settling soon into habits. And so — quite unintentionally — the courage of the man's point of view changes our conception of his homely prose. It seems somehow poetic. The fruit heaped up for dessert in that bowl of flowered china becomes a symbol of the meals at home, and the young housekeeper just back from market with a leg of mutton and a crisp brown loaf, she too becomes a symbol of the wholesome beauty that was his portion any day. And then there was the little boy blowing his soap bubbles, building his card castles, pouting because the governess reproved him for no longer playing with his toys. The good Père Chardin was never bored, like the little boy in the picture at Vienna. He had a pair of wise and wonderful eyes with which he could see, in the loveliness of daylight and its diffusion, a certain delicacy and refinement even in the look of common things. Lacking in imagination and in invention he was richly endowed with

a genius for painting and with something very much like a genius for philosophy. As Brownell has written, "there can rarely have been such an instance as he affords of an artist selecting from his environment only those things which his own genius needed, and rejecting all that would have hampered or distracted him." Painters shall always have much to learn from Chardin.

## IX

### WALTER PATER

(1913)

ALTHOUGH certainly one of the most unique and brilliant writers in the history of English literature, it is extremely doubtful whether Walter Pater will ever be popular with the general public. His appeal during his life was confined to those students of what is exquisite and somewhat exotic in art who, as Arthur Symonds put it, "take their artistic pleasures consciously, deliberately and critically with the learned love of the amateur." And so it must ever be with such an artist as Pater. To the many for whom things æsthetic are merely high-sounding names his writings must seem both affected and artificial. He is, however, among friends in the company of those who really understand what it means to live a moment's experience to its utmost capacity, to keep eye and mind, spirit and senses wide awake to every influence of strangeness and beauty, and to cherish, in spite of bewildering preoccupations, "one's own dream of a world." One of our most scholarly critics, Paul Elmer More, recently opened an old case against Pater — his principal charge being that as chief of the so-called Æsthetic School of Philosophy, he disregarded ethics and unwittingly enervated impressionable youth with luxurious phrases that presented a perverted estimate of life's values. Now to insinu-



ate, as Mr. More evidently means to do, that Pater's thought was immoral because it was in substance frankly unmoral, is to propound the dogma that literature, unlike the other arts, may not stimulate the sense of pure beauty, the appreciation of art for its own sake. No one would think of condemning a pastoral by Giorgione or a Nocturne by Chopin because the didactic element in each is lacking. In spite of the fact that such creations are altogether unmoral, they never fail to quicken our sense of the loveliness that enriches the world, and we are grateful for the pure pleasure that they bring. It is just this quality which distinguishes the prose of Walter Pater — a lyrical quality of style which stirs the pulses through inherent glamour, a lyrical quality of mind which perceives and reveals what is lyrical in art and life. We must not go to Pater for instruction nor for edification. We must go to him as we go to Giorgione, to Chopin and Debussy for the delicate beauty that will charm and soothe us and gently minister to our passing moods.

Some philosophers and critics have discovered that Pater was neither a philosopher nor a critic, but on the contrary a disturber of sound principles in philosophy and criticism. No one would have been more willing to admit the truth of these contentions than Pater himself. He realized that his way of thought was that of the whimsical and dreamful artist rather than of the authoritative scholar and connoisseur. Never did he try to force his ideas upon an unwilling or incredulous ear. Never was he intolerant or im-

patient with those who cared more for the substantial structure of facts than the filmy illusions of dreams. That in giving voice to his reflections he chose to appear as the philosopher rather than as the poet was the natural consequence of his realization that he was endowed not merely with the perfect sense of beauty, but with the far more exceptional power of tracking, through translucent analysis, the joy of an æsthetic sensation to its source. For him there was a rapture in clear thinking and critical discernment. He was altogether out of sympathy with the philosophy that deals only in abstractions, the philosophy that, in Michelet's phrase, "muddles the mind methodically." Philosophy, he thought, should serve culture. "For us of the modern world, distracted by so bewildering an experience, the problem of unity with ourselves in blitheness and repose is far harder than it was for the Greek within the simple terms of antique life. The pure instinct of self-culture cares, not so much to reap all that these various forms of culture can give, as to find in them its own strength, to struggle with them till the secret is won from each. The demand of the intellect is ever to feel itself alive." This passage from the essay on Winckelmann clearly expresses the dominant motive of Pater's life and art. Pater was an oracle in the temple of Beauty, an interpreter of strange dreams and secrets of the soul. His original achievements were two. He created a new art, the art of imaginative criticism, and he dared to emphasize the idea that spirit and sense may be very closely allied — that actual sensation depends

upon the spirit for potency of effect and that spiritual emotion may be cradled and nurtured by the senses.

In criticism no less than in philosophy the genius of Pater was subjective. Although seldom speaking in the first person singular, and thus avoiding the appearance of egotism, Pater was really so self-centred that he could only understand his own point of view. He always selected for analysis such artists as could give him hints of delicate emotions and subtle conceptions quickened, through sympathetic suggestion, within his own brain. His "Marius" and others of his imaginary portraits, were but masks behind which he could give way freely to his own moods. They are only shadowy phantoms of the mind — these characters he fashioned; the mere fabric of day-dreams — the outward semblance of souls apprehended at their unguarded hours. It was their maker's guiding principle as critic to regard "all works of art and the fairer forms of nature as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less unique kind." It was his aim to analyze these sensations and to distinguish the peculiar quality in a landscape or book or person that could produce so fine a thrilling of the mind and the emotions. Once dimly yet vividly discovered, as we discover secrets in a dream, this inner quality gave him ample opportunity for far flights of creative fancy and of imaginative reason. So — from the mysterious eyes and mouth of Leonardo's Lady Lisa a hint of something eternally subtle and disquieting stirred his brain to that famous fantasy on "a beauty wrought out from

within," "the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions"; a troubled beauty into which "the soul with all its maladies has passed." Da Vinci's adventurous passion for experiment with potential elements of mind and matter enchanted Pater so that he represented him as a dreamer seeking "glimpses of beauty and terror in the strange eyes of chance people whom he followed about the streets of Florence till the sun went down." We are granted a vision of a mysterious genius, haunting and overwhelming his friends "like one who comes across them by chance on some secret errand." In paintings of the school of Giorgione he delighted in various anticipations of modern impressionism, in accidental effects of light over lovely landscapes, in the rapid transition of thought on eager faces, in the sense of make-believe or, better yet, of music "as of an instrument sounded in the twilight when one passes through an unfamiliar room in a strange company." And in nearly all his subjects he found himself. In Wordsworth he detected his own love of retrospect and "impassioned contemplation," in Lamb, his own fine sense of words and of the "little arts of happiness in life," in Coleridge his own passion for metaphysical synthesis and the allure of mingled strangeness and beauty. But nearest to him of all the artists of the past whom he so eagerly studied was Watteau, truly the "Prince of Court Painters"; he who rehearsed the garden-comedy of life on "windless afternoons, with the storm always brooding through the massy splendour of the trees"; who, in his mellow



visions, seemed to be cherishing a dream of spiritual elegance and grace, sad with the fear that such a thing could never be.

Very fascinating are the subjects of Pater's studies and dreams, subjects that fascinate even in bare outline and quite overpower the receptive mind when coloured and shaped to a semblance of life in days of old, not of necessity as it actually was, but as it might have been, as we might acknowledge it to have been, could we actually have known the secrets of a vanished artist's innermost intention, could we actually have heard the talk, and caught the spirit of a vanished epoch. Passing through the alembic of a modern scholar's revery, through a poet's decorative imagination and a psychologist's refinement of insight, history and legend, art and literature take on new glamour that is less than half their own. It is entirely conceivable that, standing before a painting by Botticelli, our thoughts should wander to Pater's criticism of the painting — that we should thus come to realize that the painting means less to us than the criticism. We Anglo-Saxons are a blunt, outspoken race, never prone to fall in love with subtleties of perception and delicacies of expression. In fact we are inclined to be suspicious of a man whose mind we cannot easily understand, and a little contemptuous also if, in all seriousness, he keeps talking or writing without apparently intending either to teach or preach. We demand, in art as in life, a solid foundation of common sense, and it is quite true that our greatest artists have possessed that essential sanity



of genius which conquers not merely the sensitive culture of the few but the sympathetic intelligence of the many. For this reason Walter Pater can never be a popular favourite, but in good time he surely will come into his own. Then shall scholars no longer find fault with his scholarship nor protest politely about his principles. They shall then acclaim him the Keats of English prose, the supreme master of the ornate, romantic style. Never was there a writer better able to reveal the infinite possibilities of suggestion latent in language; to divine also the inseparable affinities of nouns and adjectives. As for the spell of his inversions and mellifluous cadences it is a spell as subtle, and as intricate in its effect on the ear as the spell of music. I for one prefer a simpler and less laboured prose, for instance the untroubled and easy mastery of Lamb. But there is a witchery about the style of Pater — an indescribable magic. It is so full of languorous and monotonous fascination that it is like the charm of some tropical old-world garden steeped in moonlight, where one would linger many dreamful hours, breathing the drowsy odour of strange plants, lulled by the falling of silver spray in a marble fountain. With Pater there was an ever-recurrent desire to produce prearranged sensations. He lived by preference in the remote past, in the blithe world of ancient Hellas or in the Middle Age of Europe just at the dawning of the modern spirit. The word expressionism never occurs in his books, and he never attempted to keep in touch with the radical innovations of his time. Nevertheless he was

thoroughly modern in temperament; and in his art, seeking alike the satisfaction of his curiosity and of his desire for beauty, and striving to express complexities of mood through unities of effect, he was in the strictest sense of the word an expressionist, in fact the one self-conscious and self-consecrated prophet of expressionism.

## X

### THE LYRICS OF ROBERT BRIDGES

(1913)

IT is cause for astonishment that Robert Bridges should be Poet Laureate in an age marked by the hum of machines and the shrill contending voices of the crowd; an age when mighty problems are seething and mightier meanings evolving for us all in the transforming heat. For Robert Bridges is a cool, mellow scholar, who lives reflective days in a cool mellow university atmosphere where time is apt to linger by the way; who has written poems that remind us of old, old songs in the "Golden Treasury," who at first sight seems to belong to any age except our own. Because his poems are musical with a music we already know, most of his readers confidently assert that he is unoriginal and imitative, and because he tells in simple words of simple thoughts and feelings, avoiding the problems and the passions of life, that he is a minor poet, uninspired and uninspiring. Certainly it is cause for astonishment that he is Poet Laureate for an age in which he must always seem rather like an amiable, distinguished contemporary of one's grandfather.

His elevation to the eminence of a public functionary must be a matter for astonishment to Mr. Bridges himself. He is the poet for the few because he has never written to please the many, nor has he made

concessions to their understanding. Both at his worst and at his best his poems are personal, with a certain curiously impersonal ardour for beauty that is peculiarly his own. Both at his worst and at his best his poems give the impression of an artist who is very much engrossed with his art, quite obliviously thinking loud, humming, reciting, practicing to himself and for himself. The bad poems are experimental thoughts and tunes, obviously laboured and unsuccessful, too private in their thwarted hopes to be subjected to public scrutiny. The good poems, on the contrary, no longer reveal the labours of the mind, only its satisfaction with its own art's concealment. The experimental thoughts and tunes have shaped and sung themselves from inward to outward perfection. That they seem, in spite of their abstract beauty, personal, and in spite of their subtle artistry, simple, that is the peculiar quality of Bridges' genius. For I so far disagree with the opinion that he is without inspiration, that I would say that inspiration is the one word to explain the happy accident of his rare expression. His range has been extremely narrow, his conception of his own powers singularly modest. He has always written only the sort of poetry he himself cares most to read, and loving old poems best his mind has reverted by preference to the verse forms of the earlier centuries of English song. But this narrow range and old-time style do not prove him uninspired and unoriginal, for in spite of his self-imposed limitations and his apparent imitations, he is the most inspired and original poet now living, the one poet who can write

an old song in a new way as to make us wonder why we think that the simplest truth is ever old, why we doubt that the simplest beauty is forever new.

Simplicity is really the charm of Robert Bridges' poetry and all the subtlety and skill that have gone to its making have not robbed it of this quality, because it is the very purpose of his art and the very essence of his purpose. Occasionally he is bookish. His preoccupation with classical studies spoils his moods. Archaisms and pedantic allusions shadow the transparency of his thoughts. But in the shorter poems, which alone will survive him, his words are the words of common speech and his thoughts our daily thoughts. What distinguishes him from other poets of the simpler feelings is his rare perception of the romance of familiarity the subtlety of what we had always supposed was obvious, the novelty of what we had always thought old-fashioned. This profound truth he expresses through the impressionistic method, in which delicately intricate metres are made to seem inevitable and spontaneous. It is because this method is so new that Bridges belongs to the few instead of to the many. But it is for the many that he really writes, the many for whom joys may pass unperceived but not in vain. He is the poet of contentment, of quiet hours when love repays — the poet of joy. After all his art is not song for song's sake, but for the joy that makes the heart to sing.

He is a lover of Nature — not as romantic background, nor as subject-matter for ethical or metaphysical speculations, but simply because it is good to



be out-of-doors. One has spent happy hours in the woods and on the river. Let us not forget them. One thinks of him on summer afternoons when the sun is low and minster bells pervade the stillness, or in the twilight when a brightening moon pervades the dark. When winter shuts the door the scholar loves his own fireside:

Then often I turn the page  
In which our country's name,  
Spoiling the Greek of fame,  
Shall sound in every age  
Or some Terentian play  
Renew, whose excellent  
Adjusted folds betray  
How once Menander went.

The Spring, however, stirs him from his studies, calming his spirit while quickening his pulses:

Riding a-down the country lanes  
One day in Spring,  
Heavy at heart with all the pains  
Of man's imagining.

The mist was not yet melted quite  
Into the sky.  
The small round sun was dazzling white,  
The merry larks sang high.

The stillness of the lenten air  
Called into sound  
The motions of all life that were  
In field or farm around.

Riding a-down the country lanes,  
The larks sang high.  
O heart! For all thy griefs and pains  
Thou shalt be loath to die.

The perfume of flowers and their delicacies of form and tint reawaken in him the desire for expression — the desire to evoke in words something of this flower-like loveliness — even in the sound of flowered names woven in garlands of verse:

Thick on the woodland floor  
 Gay company shall be,  
 Primrose and hyacinth  
 And frail anemone.

Perennial strawberry bloom,  
 Woodsorrel's pencilled veil,  
 Dishevell'd willow weed  
 And orchis purple and pale.

Music in its perfect union of spirit and sense, of form and feelings, is his ideal of expression, the art his own verse most nearly approaches, if indeed it is not even more truly like that readjustment of emotion after the song is still. To Music he gives the credit that "the rapture of woodland spring is stayed in its flying." It is the fugitive in life that charms him, not the great deeds nor yet the passionate thrills, but the little secret joys and fears, vague desires and fond regrets, and the sharp though unembittered sense of beauty passing — passing:

I have loved the airs that die  
 Before their charm is writ  
 Along a liquid sky  
 Trembling to welcome it,  
 Notes that with pulse of fire  
 Proclaim the heart's desire  
 Then die and are no where  
 My song be like an air.

Thus, even as in music's spell, Bridges distills the essence of unbodied emotions.

But if Nature means anything — if music has anything to say — it is love. Bridges is the poet, not of love's feverish unrest, its hunger and thirst, its torment and bitterness, nor yet of its triumphant outcries, but of its deepest, stillest ecstasies, its continuance of restful joy, when, as Arthur Symons described it, "rapture is no longer astonished at itself." Of the love lyrics particularly it is true that they are happy thoughts overheard, happy, uneventful moments made eternal. What could be more childlike in its holiday joyousness, its buoyant, unthinking, unabashed happy-heartedness than this little song:

When June is come then all the day  
I'll sit with my love in the scented hay,  
And watch the sunshot palaces high  
That the white clouds build in the breezy sky.

She singeth and I do make her a song  
And read sweet poems the whole day long,  
Unseen as we lie in our haybuilt home;  
O life is delight — when June is come.

Such is the all-inclusiveness of love that every joyous sight and sound proclaims the influence of his beloved. Nature must surely share his love of her. A summer cloud confers with the ocean how it might woo her attention:

But were I thou, O ocean,  
I would not chafe and fret,  
As thou, because a limit  
To thy desires is set.

I would command strange creatures  
 Of bright hue and quick fin  
 To stir the water near her  
 And tempt her bare arm in.

I'd teach her spend the summer  
 With me, and I can tell  
 That were I thou, O ocean,  
 My love should love me well.

Again and again we are reminded of the poet's tastes, how much he cares for Shakespeare's songs and Sidney's sonnets and Milton's shorter poems and the lyrics of Carew and Campion and Lovelace and Marvel and Herrick. He sets out deliberately to do a tributary thing and under his hand it becomes something delightfully unexpected. It is his genius to be original in spite of himself:

I love my lady's eyes  
 Above the beauties rare  
 She most is wont to prize,  
 Above her sunny hair,  
 And all that face to face  
 Her glass repeats of grace.

For they are still the same  
 To her and all that see  
 But of her eyes will flame  
 When they do look on me,  
 And so above the rest  
 I love her eyes the best.

But this playful, trifling humour of love's idler hours which recurs constantly in his pages, is tinged with a genuine, almost solemn reverence for the wonder of love's mystic joy. Words can only suggest it. The

best must remain unspoken. The reserve of Bridges is infinitely more emotional than the excessive outpourings of the less reverent poets. In perhaps his best-known lyric he has very beautifully spoken the inner spirit of his silences:

Love from whom the world begun  
Hath the secret of the sun.  
Love can tell and love alone,  
Whence the million stars were strewn,  
Why each atom knows its own;  
How in spite of woe and death,  
Gay is life and sweet is breath.

This he taught us, this we knew  
Happy in his science true,  
Hand in hand as we stood  
'Neath the shadows of the wood,  
Heart to heart as we lay  
In the dawning of the day.

Those critics who claim that Bridges is cold and passionless have completely missed the mind no less than the heart of the man. He is above all else the consecrated poet of joy — joy so sure of itself that it does not need the forced gaieties of carnival seasons, when we “escape from life to put on masks and dance a measure or two with strangers,” nor the dusk of dreams when out of mystery we create mystic moods. His joy is for any day—anywhere. It is not because he is a very charming artist that Bridges is a great poet. His art is marred by a few pedantic mannerisms acquired in an environment harmful to spontaneous expression. His greatness is his humanity. He does not, in proclaiming the joy of living, deny its sorrow,



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but he does prefer to evade lament — offering for dejection solace of hope and comfortable memory, finding a kinship between pleasure and pain:

O soul be patient — thou shalt find  
A little matter mend all this.  
Some strain of music to thy mind  
Some praise for skill not spent amiss.

Again shall pleasure overflow  
Thy cup with sweetness. Thou shalt taste  
Nothing but sweetness and shalt grow  
Half sad for sweetness run to waste.

It is ironical indeed that it should be the fate of this shy poet, who shunned publicity and who fears modernity, to be made Poet Laureate, and whose heart beats with the common heart to be regarded as aloof and austere and coldly intellectual. Yet so it is, and the lyrics of Robert Bridges shall never belong to the many who miss their meaning but to the few who appreciate their art of exquisite singing, and give thanks for their philosophy of quiet joy.

## XI

### GEORGE MOORE

(1916)

THE mind of George Moore is one of the most sensitive recording machines of which we have record. There is something positively mechanical in the unabashed, relentless accuracy of his observations and transmissions of truth. We get instantly a flash of natural effect or a spark of familiar human habit, sometimes an accident of light comparable to the fortunate strokes from the brushes of his friends — the French Impressionists, then again a trick of speech well remembered and amusing to recognize. With more unfaltering candour than anyone else would dare to use, Moore has written about himself. We not only sense everything through Moore's senses but we are also enabled to understand these sensations and to receive mental impressions from them in precisely the way in which Moore has received them. Nor has this egotist ever been self-absorbed. If we have been subjected in many of his books to passages of almost unbearable egotism, we may reasonably assume that to this practice of self-analysis and self-revelation we are indebted for the skill which has made him one of the great artists of our time. The searching light which he has turned so mercilessly on himself is the same light which he turns upon all subjects, upon the simple heart of an ignorant English servant sorely tried, upon

the earth-troubled spirit of a hermit priest roused from dreams, upon the classicism of the fastidiously selective art of Whistler, upon the modernity of Pan and the Nymphs.

At an early age George Moore determined to be consciously receptive and responsive to every influence and experience, and to formulate in thoughts and words his reactions to the various stimulations which he sought and to which he eagerly submitted. He wanted to be both a Pagan and a Modern artist and he saw no reason why he could not do justice both to Pan and to Piccadilly Circus. He wanted to feel the thrills of life as feel the unscrupulous and unchastened children of elemental conditions, but at the same time he wanted to be able to analyse emotions in a manner impossible to elemental people and he wanted to study the fascinating variations between human beings and their experiences as elemental people have no chance to do. Moore was enamoured of beauty for its own sake — the breasts of the nymph in the brake, the blue tints that the sunseting lends to a white dress. But he was also enamoured of restless, "febrile" humanity and its wistful memories of past time and its vexatious moral problems. All these thoughts were unknown in the large days when life was young; yet all these thoughts made for new and vital art.

When I heard that George Moore was revising the New Testament I confess to have experienced an apprehension of disgust. Of course I realized that I would have to read the book. I am now glad to testify that the outrageous iconoclast has at least refrained

from being sensational in his method and that he has created in "The Brook Kerith" a work which contains the subtly cadenced beauty of the English Bible sensitively and even reverently distilled and preserving the antique flavour while analysing in a modern way the most thrilling situation in history. I am now convinced that "The Brook Kerith" was not intended *primarily* to shock the orthodox, but to convey the extraordinary news that Moore has been finding intellectual and æsthetic fascinations in the Bible, that he has finally dared to interpret spirit instead of flesh and, by reason of much ingenuity and invention, has adapted old beauties of thought and style to modern tastes and temperaments, arrogantly but none the less attractively offering "new lamps for old."

Musing over this new revelation of the art of Moore I have come to realize that after all it is not surprising. I am in fact reminded of a passage at the very beginning of the first book which he published in England — the "Confessions of a Young Man": "I came into the world apparently with a nature like a smooth sheet of wax, bearing no impress but capable of receiving any, of being moulded into all shapes. I have felt the goad of many impulses, have hunted on many a trail. When one scent failed another was taken up. All lights were followed with the same ardour — all cries eagerly responded to. . . . And yet always I have remained powerless to do anything unless moved by a powerful desire." There we have him, concisely stated on the first page of his first book as an introduction to all that was liable to follow in his art and life. There

we have the man's character portrayed in striking silhouette — the selfish and impetuous Faun, indulging impulse, nourished and sustained by beauty, and moved to energy only by desire, wearing the garments, material and mental, of the inquisitive modern novelist, attracted to one interest, distracted by another, fascinated ever by the spectacle of life. There was only one place where his dual personality could be maintained and developed. "When my Mother asked me whether it would be Oxford or Cambridge, I replied that it would be Paris." "But, my dear boy, your education — you learned nothing at school!" "That is exactly why, my dear Mother, I intend to devote myself to my own education!" And so, of course, Moore went to Paris. It is inconceivable that he should have gone anywhere else.

Very amusing and self-revealing is Moore's description of his arrival with his valet at the miserable, haggard hour of half-past six in the morning at the grey and melancholy Gare du Nord: "Pale sloppy houses, an oppressive absence of colour, a peculiar bleakness in the streets; a dreadful garçon de café with a napkin around his throat moving about some chairs on the pavement, which is so awful and so solitary that it seems impossible to imagine a human being sitting there. Feeling bound to apologize for the appearance of my city, I explain to my valet that we are passing through some side streets." How much that tells of Moore — of the impressionistic realist inevitably taking notice of all he sees, and of the romantic sentimentalist unhappy at disillusionment! But soon



the Paris he had sought in his dreams rewarded the dreamer, the Paris of the Quartier Latin, where girls and men work together in studios and dine together afterwards at student taverns where dinners are paid for in pictures, the Paris of the Bois de Boulogne and of the Élysée Montmartre, the returning in fiacres "beneath the immense heavy dome of the summer nights, when the dusty darkness of the street is chequered by a passing glimpse of light skirts or flying feather and the moon looms like a magic lantern out of the sky."

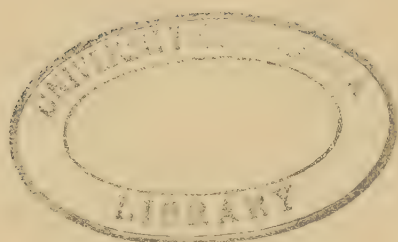
In Julien's studio Moore was less interested in his own work than in his fellow students, especially the girls. He discovered without apparently much regret that he had no talent for drawing. "The craving," he writes, "for the observation of manners, the instinct for the rapid notation of gestures and words which epitomize a state of feeling, of attitudes that mirror the soul, soon declared itself a main passion." He continued to draw and paint, but already he was preparing to be a novelist, a realist like Zola. And he went about his preparation with that calculating care which has no scruples, first cultivating, then discarding, books and friends when he ceased to have further use for them. Life was new to him and fascinating. Every thought of every person aroused his curiosity. He devoured life with his eyes, hungered to know the truth beneath appearances, and scorned to disguise his true emotions whether they were shamelessly naked or richly clothed.

The "Confessions of a Young Man" gives us the plain truth of artist life in Paris. There is no attempt

to idealize Bohemian bravado, although, having been a part of it, the narrator falls often into a sentimental strain. It was the life he had chosen for his artistic education, and he made no mistake. There can be no question that Bohemia was the making of the art of Moore. He revelled in its irresponsible adventures, its gay caprice and fantastic unreality, its light-hearted pursuit of fame, and its intensity of pain and pleasure; best of all, its luxury of talks until daybreak in cafés where poets, novelists, and painters met around marble-topped tables. By turns the talk was sentimental and satirical, extravagant and irreverent, impressionistic and iconoclastic, and fertile always with the new revolutionary conceptions of ethics and art. In a chapter of the "Confessions" entitled "The Synthesis of the Nouvelle Athènes," he reduces to type the large, fine folly of café talk, glittering with flashy attempts at paradox, with some keen witticism and much wag-gishness and wicked wit. It ends with this characteristic causerie: "How to be happy! — not to read Baudelaire and Verlaine — not to enter the Nouvelle Athènes, unless perhaps to play dominoes like the bourgeois over there, not to do anything that might awaken a too intense consciousness of life. Just to live in a sleepy countryside, to have a garden to work in, to chatter every evening over the details of existence." At the "Nouvelle Athènes," where Manet, Degas, Renoir, "et tout ces autres" allowed the clever, well-to-do young Irishman to sit at their table and be their intimate, it occurred often to Moore that he was at home in such company. He acquired a French wit



RESTING  
*By Manet*



to match his French beard, and all the studios and cafés of the Batignolle district were glad to claim that he belonged to them.

In spite of his devotion to France, Moore never renounced England and was in the habit of boasting of his "two sets of thoughts and sensations." Paris, he always said, was his playground. He tried to paint, but failed dismally and didn't very much care. He took up writing and made some morbid poems and tales in the manner of Poe, but he soon sickened of that. He read French novelists and worshipped them — Gautier, Zola, Flaubert, most of all, Balzac. Perhaps it was really the conviction that Balzac was so supreme in his exhaustive analysis of the French people, making competition on his themes seem futile and irreverent, which accounts for the curious fact that although many of Moore's novels have contained French episodes, yet his principal characters have always been enveloped in a mental atmosphere English or Irish. Moore, however, does not admit this good sense and modesty with which I credit him. His own explanation shows the sentimental Celtic strain in his composition: "Although I know these French people so well that I know what they would say on any given occasion, yet they must ever remain my pleasure not my work in life." We need not take this explanation too seriously. We can continue to believe that Moore was more or less consciously preparing himself for his work by his absorption of the minds and moods of the French men and women among whom he sought sensations and amusements. Nevertheless it is entirely



possible that if it had not been for the mismanagement of his property in Ireland, necessitating his return to England to look after his affairs and to meet the need thereafter of earning his living by his pen, he would have remained in Paris, content to occupy his unique position in the art world of that city, content to be distracted by the variety of his interests — self-indulgent and indolent, the sensual dilettante thwarting the ambitious artist. Fate willed otherwise. He was called suddenly to London and left his apartments in the rue de la Tour des Dames with his rent unpaid so that all his belongings had to be sold at auction.

Once settled in London, in cheap rooms overlooking the Strand, Moore began to turn to account his long apprenticeship. The servant girl in his London lodging-house was as near to a meek domestic animal as he had ever known. He talked to her, drew out her pitiable ignorance of all things, making notes of his impressions of her body and mind, wondering also about her soul. He became interested in the hard lot of servant girls in city and country, and in spite of himself his heart was stirred with something like tenderness and sympathy. The result was the novel "Esther Waters" in which he showed that a woman may be unable to write her name and may be thrown upon the world with a bad name to begin with and yet be a noble woman, devoted to her church and her idea of duty, possessed of unconquerable pride and love and loyalty and courage. There is no idealization of poor Esther. Nor is there any intention to moralize over

the havoc wrought upon the poor in England by betting and drinking. We are simply asked by George Moore to identify ourselves with these people as he has done, to feel their physical and mental experiences as a matter of literary interest. And yet in spite of Moore's disavowal of any desire to trouble the moral depths of our natures, pity and indignation spring instinctively to our hearts. There is, if not actually an ethical tone, at least an old-fashioned admiration for virtue in *Esther Waters*, which none of his other novels has dared to show. Consider, by way of contrast, the story of Mildred Lawson in the volume entitled "*Celibates*." Here the interest is purely psychological. Mildred is incomprehensible to herself, but very plain to Mr. Moore, and he makes her very plain also to our startled understanding. It is not often we come so near to a woman's secret thoughts. And such a woman! Fortunately, there are not many like her — avid of power, unresting until she has aroused and exposed the passions of men, physically charming and chaste, mentally cruel and disreputable.

Psychological analysis can be, oh, so difficult and dreary! With Moore it is as fascinating as music, as thrilling as melodrama. The method is so simple — nothing would seem to be easier. But as we read we almost forget that we are reading. It is never easy to write so as to be read like that. I open this story of Mildred Lawson at random and am at once uncomfortably aware of the bareness of this girl's soul, whose miserable thoughts I am overhearing. She has just

been told that the poor artist who loves her is dying. She lifts a frightened face to her informer. "What is the matter with him — do you know? He caught a bad cold about a month ago. The expression on Mildred's face changed a little. He is dying for me? she thought. And, as in a ray of sunlight, she basked for a moment in a little glow of self-satisfaction. If it were known — she pushed the thought angrily aside. It was shocking that thoughts should come uncalled for — the opposite of what she really felt. She had liked him very much. Besides, men did not die of broken hearts. She had nothing whatever to do with it. And yet she didn't know. When men set their hearts on a woman — she was very sorry, she was sorry. He was dying, and for her, yet she felt nothing. She wished to feel, she longed for the ache of regret she read of in books, she yearned for tears. Grief was beautiful. All along the streets, to the bridge where they had so often stood, she continued to woo sorrow; she thought of his tenderness, his solicitude for her, and she allowed her thoughts to dwell on pleasant hours they had passed together. She would never walk with him again in the pretty spring mornings when light mist and faint sunlight play together and the trees shake out their foliage in the warm air. How sad it all was! But she had done nothing wrong. She always knew just where to draw the line, and if other girls did not, so much the worse for them. In breaking with him, she had done the wisest thing. She could not have made him happy. She was not sure she could make anyone happy. She reproached herself for her egotism; she was always

thinking of herself, and that poor fellow dying for love of her. She knew what death was. She too had been ill. She shivered and said, 'I'm catching cold.' For the sake of her figure, she never wore enough clothes; and now she regretted her imprudence in standing so long on the misty bridge."

George Moore's fidelity to life and facility of execution always remind me of the painting of Manet — realism plus charm. The thoughts and words flow from Moore's pen as fluently as the beautiful paint from Manet's brush. It may seem at times as if these great realists had selected subjects unnecessarily disagreeable. Yet the effect of their workmanship, of the commanding ease and directness of their technical approach, is always one of sheer exhilaration. There was perhaps one modern painter whom George Moore placed above Manet. In that charming book, "Modern Painting" — one of the soundest books of art criticism of which our literature can boast — there occurs a celebrated passage of enthusiastic praise for the graceful, whimsical Whistler: "There is much in Velasquez that is stronger, but nothing in this world ever seemed to me so perfect as this picture." Thus he once wrote of the Japanese "Miss Alexander." However, there is very little of Whistler in the art of Moore. It is always of Manet that I think — the Manet of "Le Repos," that portrait of his sister-in-law Berthe Morisot, once in the Duret, now in the George Vanderbilt Collection. The woman who reclines, with so delicious a sense of relaxation on her plum-coloured sofa, does not care how



she looks. We feel not only her fatigue, but her comfort in repose. These physical sensations are expressed in the dead weight of the woman's body in its ample white home dress that no one need see — "*une petite confection de soixante cinq francs*," as Moore describes it. There is an intimacy, a plain speaking, a sense of sex, and a surprising sense of the beauty of modern truth-telling about this picture, the charm of which can be conveyed in no better way than by saying that it is like a pleasant page out of a novel by George Moore.

But the Moore that Manet illustrates is only half of the man and less than half of the artist. It was Moore who said: "The two rhythms out of which the music of life is made are intimacy and adventure"; in other words, the stirring influences of the near and far, of the known and the unknown, of realism and symbolism. Shelley's name, repeated over and over by George Moore in his boyhood, gave him a foretaste of the beauty of dreams and mysteries.

In later life it was Edward Martyn who aroused the interest of George Moore in music. He it was also who made Moore homesick for Ireland. Impulsively the seeker of new sensations went to Dublin and associated himself with the literary Renaissance then well under way. He caught the Yeats trick of speech and thought, and soon afterwards he wrote that "we are lonely in a foreign land because we are deprived of our past life. Here the past is all about us. We see it at evening glimmering among the hollows of the hills." He lived in Dublin from 1901 to 1911. With his aston-



ishing power of dramatic impersonation of types often the antithesis of his own, he accurately represented the viewpoint and transcribed the language of celibate Irish priests and ignorant Irish peasants, and applied his painter's skill to the recording of impressions made upon him by the melancholy Irish landscape blurred by white light and rain. All the while Italy and France called to him, but he pretended not to listen to their call. In a sketch from "The Untilled Field" entitled "The Way Back," a young Irish sculptor, who is abandoning ascetic Ireland in despair, raves of Italy, the blue shadows of Perugia, the splendid pagan models always knocking at one's door. In London this sculptor meets an Irish painter who has lived always in Paris, now on his way back to his native land—with intent to stay. The sculptor is amazed. "Your biographer," he says, "will be perplexed to explain this Celtic episode. How did the idea come to you?" "How do ideas come to anyone?" is the reply of Mr. Moore's spokesman. "A thought passes. A sudden feeling comes over you, and you are never the same again. Driving along the Dublin mountains I met two women — and there was something wistful about them, something dear. I felt that I should like to live among these people again. There is a proverb in Irish which says that no man at all ever wanders far from his own grave-sod. You tempt me with Italy, but you won't be angry when I tell you that the Italian Renaissance would not interest me half as much as what Paddy Dirkin and Father Pat will say to me on the road."

There is unquestionably an element of humour in the association of the plain-spoken George Moore with such mystics as Yeats, Martyn, and Russell. We can be forgiven the thought that his return to Irish soil and his research into the Irish sagas were enjoyed somewhat in the way he would enjoy a masquerade — at best an adventure. The Celtic Renaissance was sure to be a chapter of historical attractiveness. Having established an enviable reputation as the youngest of the realists, it was a temptation for Moore to appear suddenly as the oldest of the symbolists, to get into the picture of the earnest troupe of Irish poets, playwrights, and players. However, it would be unfair to grant Moore no sincerity in this new enthusiasm. Even if the emotion he felt was but a transient spell, the effect of an accident of moonlight on his mind, nevertheless it was, between the time of its coming and going, a thoroughly Celtic sort of emotion, and absolutely real to him. Perhaps at the time, he was really surfeited with thoughts of modern women. "There are moments when one does not think of girls — are there not?" says Max Beerbohm, satirizing Moore. In such a moment, Moore's thoughts wandered back to Ireland, to stray through haunted rooms of old castles or on the shores of lonely lakes. There is a little song by Moira O'Neill which voices the homesickness of an Irishman working in England. "Och Corymeela," he cries in his longing and through his dreams the home of his childhood looks like Heaven — "Sweet Corymeela and the same soft rain." Who knows — possibly even George Moore could have

sung that song to himself at twilight, in the foreign twilight of his rooms in London.

Perhaps the most mature and the most complete expression of Moore's many-sided personality is to be found in his novel, "The Lake." And perhaps Father Oliver Gogarty is closer to Moore himself than one might at first suppose. If, at this most impressionable age, the novelist had fallen under the influence of mystic books and an environment suggestive of mystic melancholy his ardour for any new enthusiasm might conceivably have persuaded him to consecrate himself to a life of meditation and self-sacrifice. But inevitably he would have met his Rose Leicester. Even in the loneliest parish in Ireland, her fresh beauty would have troubled his senses, her flowery influence would have disturbed his dreams, blowing in across his soul like a whiff of spring through the open windows of his library. The opposition of the flesh and the spirit — this has been the endless theme of thinkers. Seldom has this conflict been brought home to us with so intimate a knowledge of its poignant moods as in "The Lake."

The characterization of Rose Leicester is an amazing *tour de force*. Although we know her only in her letters, she is vividly real and exerts her subtle power even over the suspicious reader. She is a blithe, remorseless pagan woman, but a pagan with a modern mind, like her creator, a nymph who has thrilled to the music of Wagner and put away faith with other childish things. Wise in her elemental woman's instinct, she knows of the priest's love for her long be-

fore he realizes it himself. Her letters are carefully calculated to awaken him slowly but surely to the truth of his own nature, to his craving for the good things of this world. She writes to him of her travels, of her discovery of glorious new thoughts and emotions, and she has the cruelty to add: "When I write to you about my happiness I do not feel sure whether it will please you. But you must not feel that way. You must like to hear that I am making friends wherever I go, and you must become reconciled to the idea that I, who was a dissonance in Ireland, am become a part of the English harmony. And it is such a pleasure to be in harmony with one's surroundings — one's work so interesting one goes to it smiling along the street." Later, when she is sure of him, she writes with greater directness: "The book you sent me — the *Imitation* by A Kempis, I do not like and I want you to put it by, to come abroad to see pictures in a beautiful country. We must not think entirely of our duties to others. We must think of our duties to ourselves. Nature has given you so many gifts. I wonder what will become of you." Oliver Gogarty at last surrenders. In the shadows of dusk, the priest strips himself of all priestly garments and swims the lake to its opposite shore. While his devout parishioners are lamenting his death by drowning, he is on the deck of a steamer bound for New York, writing these lines: "There is a lake in every man's heart, and every man must ungird his loins for the crossing."

I have an idea that the motive which impelled Moore to write "The Lake" was the desire to imagine



himself in the cassock and conscience of a lonely priest, make-believing that he had remained in Ireland, and responding to the spell of mystic Catholicism instead of going to sit at the feet of Zola and Manet in Paris. When in 1898 a friend gave him at Christmas a copy of the Bible he was amused and pleased. He found the book "a literature in itself" and a feast for any novelist. In his dedication of "The Brook Kerith" to the giver of that Bible, Moore declares that it has been his "constant companion and chief literary interest for the last eighteen years." We have no reason to be skeptical. It is only another instance of an insatiable appetite for new experiences of the mind, and it reveals how consciously the novelist desired to show that every thought of every person that ever lived is regarded by him as well within the scope of his art's potential analysis. For the last eighteen years we can imagine Moore wondering how he would have reacted to the great charm and inspiration of Jesus of Nazareth if he had lived near Galilee amid the ferment of that age. And so, in "The Brook Kerith" Joseph of Arimathea represents the Moore that might have been. He reveals the novelist's restless curiosity about all that is going on and his desire to appear prominently in the front rank of an important new Movement.

Moore's Joseph is a meditative dilettante whose sufficient wealth enables him to indulge his hobby of studying the conflicting sects and philosophies and listening to the popular prophecies of the day. Very beautiful and characteristic of the author is the



passage where Joseph, home again on Pilate's business after fruitless wanderings in search of Jesus, learns from his skeptical but apprehensive father of a new Prophet's disturbing presence and meddlesome activities around their lake. Their own fishermen, Peter and Andrew, James and John, have, like the fools they are, put down their nets and become his meek disciples. And there are many others, neglecting their work and telling of the coming Kingdom and quarrelling over their shares in it on that day when the Prophet returns from Heaven in a chariot. Learning that the Prophet is the Jesus of his dreams, Joseph turns pale and seeks to be alone in the garden. That night he meets Jesus and falls readily under the spell. Sitting on his bed in the moonlight the wonderful experience he has just been through is not yet past. Ecstasy returns with the thought of how the warbling waters at the lake's edge, the faint odours, the bird's song, the stars and the words of Jesus had all seemed but one thing. "Whosoever admires the stars and the flowers finds God in his heart." Out of the sensuous joy of a vivid remembrance is born to Joseph an ecstasy of religious devotion.

To many devout minds the story of "The Brook Kerith" will afford an example of wrong-hearted sacrilege. Instead of the beautiful testimony of the apostles we have a legend about Jesus, a shepherd exalted by extraordinary fervours to the point of imagining himself the promised Messiah. Instead of the Resurrection we have a story of Jesus taken down alive from the Cross, removed by Joseph from

the tomb to his own house and there nursed back to health, of his confusion of mind and gradual return to memory, of his impulse to resume again his duties as shepherd on the hills of his home. This impulse he obeys (his journey in the loving care of Joseph is exquisitely described), but as time goes on he wishes to return to Jerusalem in order to confute the mistaken preachments of Paul; in order to renounce his former blasphemy of belief and harshness of teaching and to confess his humble humanity and his simple creed. In the end he is persuaded to let Paul's good work go on. Moore does not ask us to believe his story. It is fiction, not history. In spite of its elaborate and unwelcome iconoclasm there is in "The Brook Kerith" a wealth of art which we may enjoy while rejecting the hypothesis. As an extraordinary narrative, in which a method of impressionistic description and colloquial dialogue is merged with the scriptural solemnity of style without seriously impairing the ancient glamour, the work must be recognized as a new achievement in fiction. Amazing are the powers Moore reveals of subtle adaptation. Long after I have forgotten the story I shall remember the style and the wonderful landscapes. And the reverence for spirituality which Moore at last reveals completes the development of an art which I have tried to trace from its beginning.

When all is said and we have paid George Moore his due of appreciation as a superbly gifted artist, we can take pleasure in asserting that this same George Moore is not at all our conception of a great man.

The superstructure of his art is fascinating in detail and the general effect is one of allied strength and grace. But we are suspicious of the foundations. Even if the work is sound from the bottom up, the construction as substantial as the taste is subtle and sure, yet we feel a certain insecurity. We have seen the character of the soil on which the house is built, and we have had an impression of shifting sand. It is the fundamental weakness of Moore as a novelist that, for all his remarkable skill in concealing himself behind his characters and their various points of view, he remains incurably self-conscious. He gets into the inner lives, the mental experiences of his men and women, but chiefly for the purpose of being the better able to appreciate and enjoy their physical characteristics. We often wonder whether Moore's people do not think and feel, and sin and suffer, and even go through the processes of eating, drinking, and making love just to indulge the taste of their creator for watching the behaviour of the human species. Perhaps we do his novels injustice — perhaps we re-read them thus in the reflected light of four voluminous volumes of autobiography. Yet we merely state the fact that when we hear the name — George Moore — in spite of all his devotion to objective art and the distinguished literary portraits which he has produced thereby, it is of George Moore only that we think.

And then he is, in the last analysis, not really passionate and personal, but *cold*. His heart never seems to have warmed with any profoundly felt sympathies and ideals. He has ever seemed to care less for

his sympathies and ideals than for their interpretation and expression. This personal limitation has not stood in the way of his resourceful artistry and his subtle appreciations of many different phases of beauty. As a novelist, however, he is disqualified, by reason of this very detachment, from the supremely high place to which the technical distinction of his art would otherwise entitle him.





## BOOK II

*I broider the world upon a loom,  
I broider with dreams my tapestry.  
Here in a little lonely room  
I am master of earth and sea,  
And the planets come to me.*

*. . . . .  
And the only world is the world of my dreams,  
And my weaving the only happiness,  
For the world is only what it seems.  
And who knows but that God, beyond our guess,  
Sits weaving worlds out of loneliness.*

ARTHUR SYMONS — "THE LOOM OF DREAMS"

## XII

### THE DECORATIVE IMAGINATION

(1912)

WHICH is the more essential purpose of painting — to represent or to decorate? That is a question each of us must decide for himself, to his own satisfaction at least. Some people assume that pictures should imitate objects according to certain preconceived notions as to what constitutes life-likeness. Anything that is unnatural seems to them unsuccessful since, in their philosophy, the imitation of Nature is the only conceivable justification for pictorial art. Should they see a picture where the artist has taken liberties with exact truth for the sake of producing a certain expressive effect, they will exclaim all in one breath — “I-never-saw-a-sky-like-that-did-ever-see-a-blue-tree?” Should you attempt to give them a conception of a pictorial purpose other than the imitative they will regard you with rather resentful suspicion. They may be insensible to some phases of beauty, but they yield to no one in regard to any kind of truth. They are simply utterly lacking in subjective invention and decorative imagination. Then there are others who cannot see anything pictorial about the life that they most ardently enjoy. They will not tolerate the representative. “Why trouble with Nature at second hand” — they say — “when we can possess the real thing every day? Na-

ture is good enough for us, and a great deal better than any counterfeit. As for Art, let it create new forms of beauty in colour and design; rhythmical arrangements that will lift us out of ourselves, creating in us impersonal emotions." Now all observant and intelligent people tend more or less to one or the other of these extreme points of view.

Of course extremes are always deplorable. Painting should, according to the painter's temperament in the matter of comparative emphasis, be both representative and decorative. Furthermore, the two functions are interdependent. No pictorial representation can hope to attain greatness if it disregards such decorative principles as unity of design and harmony of colour. On the other hand, no pictorial decoration can safely maintain its legitimacy among the representative arts if it is not based on Nature and its raw materials of form and colour. The pattern wholly unrelated to life passes into the category of mere ornament. Representative and decorative painting should really be regarded as one and the same art, engaged in special missions and governed by special laws. The difference is merely this, that representative painting, however decorative it may be, appeals, in its character of commentary upon life, through the agency of the sense of sight, to the mind and its associations, and only thus, through the mind, to the emotions. Painting on the other hand that is purely decorative acts directly upon the emotions through the independent agency of the æsthetic sense.

It is nevertheless a mistake to suppose that repre-

sentative pictures cannot decorate nor decorative pictures represent, simply because one type cultivates the concrete and the other the abstract. The applied arts of the Orient are an illustration of the desirable union of these separate art motives. Few are the ornaments that are not carved or etched with images. There is no Japanese painting or colour print that does not quite confidently assert the right of the artist to represent Nature with whatever conventional symbols he chooses to select. After all, decoration is not merely a sensuous beauty of pattern made to please the eye. In the last analysis it is Imagination; the indefinable *spirit* that rejoices in beauty of pattern or beauty of sentiment; the very personal *impulse* that selects a dream or a design and cherishes it; that for some of us exists as taste and for others of us as poetry. Obviously the function of decorative art is to give pleasure, and the spirit that animates its creation is perfectly in accord with that function. The decorative spirit, then, although perhaps most directly applicable to the plastic arts, is a potent force in all art. Let us consider it for a moment in literature.

Before me lies a recent edition of the Persian poet Omar Khayyám as rendered by Edward Fitzgerald into the exquisite English poem we know so well. In this new bottle the old wine retains its richness. The colour prints by Edmond Dulac sensitively convey the original thrill of the text, hinting at the *mise en scène* — the Persia of Omar's day. We feel rather than see the blue of distant mountains, the purple and green of vineyards, the faint tint of roses drenched



in moonlight. And this is as it should be. It is with colour we associate the verse. In fact, the greater part of the pleasure that we derive from Fitzgerald's Omar we owe, not so much to its philosophy, as to its sensuous witchery when expressed in the music of memorable words, words dimly revealing beyond the shadows of the proud pessimism a glow of Oriental peacock and old ivory. Pessimism that really means despair would affect us very differently, I think. Surely the old poet, while he arraigned the universe and renounced all hope, was taking his ease on some lofty terrace —

Losing his fingers in the tresses of  
The cypress-slender minister of wine.

And so we too roll the Orient quatrains under our tongue to suck their flavour —

Whether at Naishapur or Babylon,  
Whether the cup with sweet or bitter run,  
The wine of life keeps oozing drop by drop,  
The sands of life keep falling one by one.

But do we enter through these sad thoughts into a darkening vale? No, rather the enchanted East — the land of golden ports where ships lie sleeping, of storied cities with their mosques and minarets: the land where, in the shade of a comfortable oasis, we would gaze upon the burning skies and terrible sand billows of the desert. Lo, the spirit of decoration has enthralled us! The words have become dreams and the dreams pictures. The reverse being equally true, it was in all seriousness that W. E. Henley once wrote

of the paintings of Monticelli, "his clangours of bronze and gold and scarlet, his fairy meadows and enchanted gardens are, so to speak, that sweet word Mesopotamia in two dimensions . . . their parallel in literature, the verse one reads for sound's sake only."

The decorative imagination then implies a compromise between the mind and the senses. In paintings it either approaches the thought and sentiment of romantic poetry or the abstract sensation of romantic music. To such extremely different painters as Monticelli and Whistler the same achievement is often ascribed, namely, the creation of colour-music. Although Whistler's colour soothes the sense like subtle webs of sound woven by violins, whereas Monticelli's colour is a fanfare of bugles and drums and clashing cymbals, wild, persistent and exciting, yet the æsthetic philosophy of the two men is, in a sense, the same. Both wished it plainly understood that their appeal to the emotions was not intellectual but sensuous. In order to make clear his seeking for abstract colour-music, independent of subjects and ideas, Whistler would paint a vast expanse of sea and sky and call his marine, not "Cloudy Day on the Coast of France," but "Symphony in Gray and Green" or in "Violet and Blue." When his canvases were made to vanish in the mystery of starlight there was no romance to stir our fancy unless we felt it in the "Harmony of Silver and Blue" or "the Nocturne in Black and Gold." Quite recently I saw a little picture by T. W. Dewing which carried, quite as far as the master would have wished, the symphonic

modulation of tone. In a bare, high-vaulted room, enveloped in mauve-tinted twilight, two calm, dim figures seemed to dwell at the heart of a dark yet lustrous pearl. Both Whistler and Dewing are really imaginative in spite of their colour for colour's sake, just as we may certainly ascribe imagination to certain composers who, true to their art, attempt to express nothing but sound for sound's sake. In each case the imagination has been stirred by means of the senses. Equally imaginative was the excited dreamer Monticelli. His raptures proceeded from very chaotic mental impressions. Certainly less thought went into the making of his pictures than Chinese weavers put into their rugs and Persian potters put into their jars and bowls. Yet our minds insist upon 'playing with these fantasies until out of one picture emerges the court of Haroun al Raschid and out of another the court of the Fairy Queen.

Just as many a poem will affect us like a picture so many a picture will give us the less physical and more intellectual reaction of a poem. Keats, Coleridge, and Rossetti — what sumptuous romantic pictures they painted with words! The other day I was walking quickly through an exhibition when my glance fell upon a tiny canvas unmistakably the work of Albert P. Ryder. It was made of no positive colours and with only vague whispers of form, yet I was made to pause for a few moments enchanted by the air of old romance. The title was "The Lovers" and at once I thought of all the frosty moonlight and stained-glass richness and sweet, enraptured passion of the "Eve of

St. Agnes" by Keats. But did I need the association and the memories that thronged it? Across a moon-white porch I could see the lovers hurrying, and beyond the Gothic arch a glimpse of moon-flooded country. The suggestion was not really of Keats but of the ecstatic mood he so exquisitely celebrated. There was in that little picture of Ryder's a definite literary content, but its style was like a flavour — an essence — a re-creation in plastic arabesque and jewelled colour. What I wish to illustrate is the essential similarity of the two types of decorative imagination, the abstract and the concrete, the art of Ryder made for the sake of emotional pattern and plastic form, the art of Keats wrought for the sake of articulate emotion with the potentially plastic concealed in the poetic. Unity of effect is as essential to one as to the other. If this unity prevails, the two styles are really made one by their identical spirit.

Although literary art then should never be merely pictorial, nor pictorial art merely literary, yet there is no reason why one art may not receive suggestion and inspiration from the other in the same way that both receive suggestion and inspiration from Nature. In fact a picture and a poem may supplement each other to mutual advantage. I never see Titian's "Bacchanals" without thinking of two famous passages of Keats, nor can I read those lines without recalling the two superb canvases by Titian. The original Greek myth of forsaken Ariadne following Bacchus over the hills and dales of Naxos by the sea becomes of vital interest to us all because of the inspiration it has been

to art, so great that it can never die. Through an inspired flash of decorative imagination the genius of Titian revealed the possibilities of emotional expression latent in the old story; the mood of mind that stirred Ariadne out of her bitter thoughts to become a part of the Pagan joy of earth; to leap and sing through all the glorious morning world, exultant with the mad, glad pulse of life; to follow the God of the merry heart wherever his whim might lead.

And as I sat, over the light blue hills  
There came a noise of revellers: the rills  
Into the wide stream came of purple hue,  
'Twas Bacchus and his crew.

The earnest trumpet spake and silver thrills  
From kissing cymbals made a merry din,  
'Twas Bacchus and his kin!  
*Like to a moving vintage down they came,  
Crowned with green leaves and faces all a-flame,  
All madly dancing through the pleasant valley  
To scare thee, melancholy!  
I rushed into the folly.*

Whence came ye, merry damsels — whence came ye,  
So many and so many and such glee?  
Why have ye left your bowers desolate  
Your lutes and gentler fate?  
We follow Bacchus — Bacchus on the wing  
A-conquering!

Bacchus, young Bacchus, good or ill betide,  
We dance before him through the kingdoms wide;  
Come hither, lady fair, and joinéd by  
To our wild minstrelsy.





BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

*By Titian*



Of course it was impossible, even for so supreme a romantic poet as Keats to rival by the sheer richness of his phrase the colour of so supreme a romantic colourist as Titian. But the poet experienced the same mood as the painter and expressed it with equal fervour and inspiration. He did not attempt to describe or imitate the picture but the wonderful rhythm of its colours and lines and its happy vision of a legendary world thrilled his spirit with a kindred passion, so that, through his own medium of many coloured words, he too rejoiced to use his decorative imagination. Titian's "Bacchus and Ariadne" of the National Gallery, London, is not only, from a technical viewpoint, one of the most beautiful paintings in the world, but it represents the pinnacle of poetic rapture to which a mere colour-sense may successfully aspire. We do not need to know anything definite about the scene represented. We understand at a glance the mood for which the old myth was but a symbol. We understand what at the same moment fascinates and repels Ariadne as the young wine god, waving his radiant robe into the silvery sky, leaps down from his leopard-drawn chariot. We understand what he means to the bronze-red satyrs, the Earthmen, and to the beautiful Bacchantes with their wind-blown draperies of flame-red and peacock-blue, and to the goat-footed baby boy who with misty eyes skips along, a little dazed by all the frolic and the ecstasy. The shadows cast by the creamy-tinted, billowy-bosomed clouds transfigure the deep blue mountain-tops, the bronze-green valley and the turquoise

sea. There is an irresistible onward movement in the sky, and on the earth. Almost overpowering is the exhilaration with a joy that tends to madness; the unreasoning, onrushing riot of the winds in heaven and of the hot blood in the veins of youth.

In the "Bacchus and Ariadne" Titian conceived a melodious pattern of rhythmic lines and resounding colours that expressed quite perfectly the Renaissance conception of the physical joy of living, also of that passionate, thoughtless, never-ending worship of beauty that delights in life and light and all the lovely things that thrill the soul and pass away. In the Bacchanal of the Prado Gallery, Madrid, the means of expression are the same and the subject similar, but the mood expressed is somehow quite different. Here the tones are less vibrant, and more mellow, chestnuts, plums and pomegranates predominating. The texture and surface quality of the pigments and the canvas are varied and controlled for emotional effect as a great composer varies and controls the orchestration of his symphony. We are made one with Bacchus and his crew. Their richness of mood, their luxury of well-being is ours for all time. The revel of the morning has spent its frenzy, and the revellers are a little weary of their wine and song. The old satyr who has been treading grapes on the sunny hilltop lies face upward watching the clouds drift by. The purple stream still trickles down the slope to the luscious pool where the young men fill once their goblets. A few are singing. A few are dancing. But the animation is no longer general. Glad are the fair Bacchantes to throw them-

selves down on the pleasant shore and let the low sounds of the sea merge with the drowsy spell of golden afternoon. Dreamily we gaze with them at the sails of a great galleon outspread in the lingering light. The shadows are lengthening. The day is fading. Already it seems best to revel no more — only to muse how merry we have been, and how good it is to renew one's youth with love and laughter and the balm of golden air. Once, in the midst of a poem full of passionate dejection, Keats yearned for the beauty of a Southland Bacchanal.

Oh, for a draught of vintage that hath been  
Cooled a long age in the deep delvéd earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth!

Oh, for a beaker full of the warm south,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim  
And purple stained mouth,  
That I might drink and leave the world unseen  
And with thee fade into the forest dim.

There was a great difference after all between the symbolism of Titian and of Keats. The dream that was but a poignant feverish desire to the overstrained mind of the dying poet was the incarnation of joy replete and overflowing to the triumphant painter of perhaps the most delightful romanticism that the world has ever known.



### XIII

## THE SPELL OF THE EAST

(1912)

**W**E all have known people of taste, of temperament, perhaps even of talent, "artistic people" we call them, who somehow seem a little "distract" about their pleasures, a little panic-stricken about their lives, looking around them almost wildly as if they were conscious of losing their way, with the night closing in around them. Eager for experience, avid of beauty and its expression, yet they seem bewildered. We wish we could do something before it is too late, to help them find their way out of the luxuriant jungle of life's conflicting purposes. Such people sometimes glimpse the way from afar off but struggle towards it in vain, never seeming to get much nearer, baffled ever by distance and doubt and distracting circumstance. Some find it when the day is spent. A few are led, by accident, by grace of what you will, through the maze of their own mistakes, to the path they were meant to travel.

There are many instances of artists who have found in the Orient their inspiration — who, in following the weirdly beckoning spirit of the East, have obtained the release of baffled powers which else had never won fulfilment. Edward Fitzgerald, grim, indolent old scholar and country gentleman, had few interests in life and therefore wrote half-heartedly until one

day he saw in the Bodleian Library that which was to emancipate his spirit — a Persian manuscript — purple ink powdered with gold, the original text of the *Rubáiyat* of Omar Khayyám. All his world-weariness vanished and his indolence changed to feverish energy. To-day Fitzgerald is an English classic because he once enjoyed the richness of a crinkly Persian parchment and was moved to make a garden of Persian quatrains grow in the soil of Anglo-Saxon words. Such an art implies an attitude. As Stevenson recognized, “*Romanticism is consciousness of the background.*” It was the taste for sumptuous backgrounds that sent the painters Delacroix, Décamps and Fromentin to the Orient. To my mind it is only Décamps who had the Orient in his own soul and was able therefore to bring it back with him on canvas. Whenever I am in Paris I go to the collection Moreau Nelaton to see Décamps’ “Arab Army” enveloped in sunset mist. Dimly, in the golden distance, may be seen chariots and marching men, but the substance of it all is expressed in the splendour of one turbaned horseman darkly silhouetted against a sky of storm-swept scarlet and gold.

It was Décamps who first revealed to the West how a Western heart can feel about Eastern colour. To-day we are passing through an Oriental phase of dancing, of dress, of decoration. Some of the greatest living painters have responded to the influence. The stage pictures of Léon Bakst: with what wizardry of colour he tells all we need to know of Cleopatra’s Egypt and fabled Bagdad! To appreciate Bakst one

must see his ensemble — one must share his delight in the heights and depths of the stage, the greatly daring lights and colours and costumes. And yet the mere cartoons for opera and ballet have almost as much intrinsic merit as the glowing miniatures which are growing so popular. What a rich humour, too, in the Bakst drawings! I recall one Mameluke most delectable in his fierceness of visage. Scarcely less appealing both to the general public and to those who know why art is art, are the colour-books of Edmond Dulac. His colours he has found in the iridescence of ancient potteries. Such an art obviously implies an attitude, but most assuredly the attitude does not imply the art. Many are called to express the glamour of the Orient but few are chosen. Dulac's pictures for the Arabian Nights fairly reverberate with fantastic laughter, and this is also true of the book decorated by our own Maxfield Parrish. One does not have to be a child to enjoy such horrific allurements. The decorative imagination of these illustrators sends us all back to the pungent feast of fables with renewed relish. Something of this luxury of mood W. R. Benét has expressed in a metrical appreciation of the fair, resourceful Morgiana dancing wildly to the impending doom of her master's enemy, the last of the forty thieves.

Scarves about my head — so!  
 Silver girdle flash — ho!  
 Round again again we go,  
 Round again again we go.  
 Chalk upon the panel there,  
 Oil upon the pave there,

A guest ho! A guest ho!  
A sweet guest — ho!

Poniard at my breast so!  
Poniard at thy breast ho!  
Round again again we go,  
Round again again we go.  
Here's a dagger's smart should be  
Salt for your villany.  
A guest ho! a guest ho!  
A dead guest ho!

By way of this impressionistic verse I may retrace my steps to my subject. Of the many distinguished writers of our own tongue who responded to Oriental inspiration — such men as Edwin Arnold, Richard Burton, Bayard Taylor, Rudyard Kipling — the only conscious impressionist of them all is Kipling. He introduced to literature British India; a land where old gods make way for modern garrisons, where soldiers and civilians serve their time on the outposts of the world. Atmosphere is one of the distinctive features of Kipling's impressionism. From a lofty minaret we look down on the moonlit "City of Dreadful Night" — the naked corpse-like bodies huddled in the shadows of the moon or exposed beneath its staring, blazing eyes, the long road laid across the scorching land "like a bar of burnished steel"; the silver light splashed across the house-tops where men, women and children kept sighing in their restlessness. But it is not alone by description that he can create in our minds the sense of weather. He can affect us with it by slipping hints into his dialogue.

Never was there such stifling, sickening heat in the pages of a book as in that intolerably pathetic story "At the End of the Passage." It is a superb bit of literary impressionism.

However, Kipling has written also of the sea and the supernatural, of English public school and country-house life. The most striking case of *complete* absorption of the Oriental genius by a Western artist is the strange case of Lafcadio Hearn. Hearn was a morbid, unpleasant fellow before he became a permanent resident of Japan. He hated everything others liked and went restlessly about the world in quest of new sensations and intellectual excitements to satisfy a craving he scarcely understood. In fact he was well on his way towards becoming an English version of Théophile Gautier whose stories he translated, or perhaps another Baudelaire. In other words, he was one of the kind who scorn the brave simplicities, preferring man's tricks of artifice to Nature's open bounties, giving free rein to the capricious devices of a jaded and unhealthy imagination. Suddenly in a book by Percival Lowell a spirit finger pointed to the East. In the Land of the Rising Sun, of old time, a land of ghosts and flowers, the god he desired to worship awaited him in an airy temple. He went within the dragon-swarming portals and offered sacrifice at the Buddhist shrine. The old order even then was changing, but enough of that archaic civilization remained to hold him spell-bound with delight and wonder. Here were new sensations a-plenty. Here was a supreme opportunity for the art of a master to



evoke the body and mind, to express the heart and soul of old Japan, in order to interpret this mysterious civilization to the Western world of totally alien sensibilities and perceptions. For this purpose surely Lafcadio Hearn was born, with his craving for the exotic and the unearthly, with his sensibilities as tremulously emotional as a child's, with his matured mastery of the subtleties of percept and concept, and the delicacies of language and the arts.

Of all the strange charms that stirred his spirit as he conducted his ecstatic researches into the lives and legends of the Japanese, the one which cast the most potent spell over him was the idea of Karma, or the transmigration of souls. He even essayed to reconcile this Eastern doctrine to the Evolution of the West. But I am inclined to feel that his Buddhism need not be taken any more seriously than his professed devotion to Darwin and Spencer. Essentially this man was neither a philosopher nor a scientist, but a poet and an artist. In Japan he found a civilization older and more bizarre, hence to him more appealing, than the long vanished civilization of ancient Greece. He entered into this incredible world exulting in its strangeness and charm. The simplest revelations of Japanese character, the most casual corners of Japanese scenery, the most trifling scraps of Japanese folklore, filled him with æsthetic pleasure, with the new sensations and intellectual excitements which amid all the complexities of Europe and America he could not find. And yet so perfect was his art and so genuine his inspiration that the filmy cobwebs of ghostly

legend and the tiny dewdrops of poetic fancy which he found sparkling on the surface of common life were transmuted into pearls through the sympathy and insight of his translations. Here is a poem on the firefly which so deeply appeals to the Japanese æsthetic sense:

Because it is speechless though burning with desire the firefly  
is more worthy of our pity than insects that cry out.

And here is another — a veritable epigram:

Would that I might always keep my butterfly-pursuing heart.

We do not think of the girl who composed the verse, but of the man who translated it. How pathetic that poor Hearn, he of the eccentric and irregular life, should have a "butterfly-pursuing heart." Yet the line expresses him and his life-work. He was always seeking the beauty of little things, the beauty that lingers but for a moment, delicate in colour, fugitive of wing. It was the impressionism ingrained in the Japanese, both in the outward appearance and in the inward significance of their life and art that brought out the impressionism of his own nature.

All of Hearn that really matters — Hearn the Mystic and Hearn the Impressionist — may be found in one rhapsody entitled "Horai." This is not as truly the Chinese conception of heaven as the Japanese heaven on earth of his own unattainable ideal. The ethnologist was not so much concerned with facts about the old Japan of cruel feudal wars, as was the artist with his luminous dreams of a spirit-world too beautiful to be true. Like Leonardo he burned to communicate

the incommunicable, and to formulate the intangible. Only a few years ago I was sailing on the pale waters of the Inland Sea. It was a pearly evening. A veil of opalescent air enfolded me. The distant hills were violet, the clouds were rose in the misty sunlight. For a few enchanted moments I could almost see Hearn's vision of a mortal fairy-land, suspended between earth and heaven.

"Blue vision of depth lost in height, sea and sky interblending . . . one azure enormity. But far away in the midway blue hangs a faint, faint vision of palace towers, with high roofs curved like moons, shadowing of a splendour strange and old, illumined by a sunshine soft as memory. These are the glimmering portals of Horai the blest. In Horai the flowers never fade, and the fruits never fail, and the magical grass is watered by a fairy water of which a single drink confers perpetual youth. But the most wonderful thing of all is the atmosphere. The sunshine is whiter than any other sunshine, a milky white that never dazzles. The atmosphere is not of our period. It is enormously old, and it is made not of air but of ghosts, blended into one immense translucency. Whatever mortal man inhales that atmosphere he takes into his blood the thrilling of these spirits, and they change the senses within him, so that he can see only as they used to see, and think as they used to think, and feel as they used to feel. Soft as sleep are these changes of sense. In Horai the hearts of the people never grow old. The speech of the women is like bird song because the hearts of them are light as the souls of birds;

and the swaying of the sleeves of the maidens at play seems a flutter of wide, soft wings. Nothing is hidden but grief, because there is no reason for shame, and by night as by day all doors are unbarred, because there is no reason for fear. And because the people, though mortal, are fairies, all things are small, and quaint and queer. Evil winds from the West are blowing over Horai, and the magical atmosphere is shrinking before them. It lingers now only on the long bright banks of clouds, like those in the Japanese landscapes. Under these elfish vapours you may still see Horai, but not elsewhere. Remember it is only Shinkiro, which signifies mirage — the Vision of the Intangible. And now the vision is fading, never again to appear, save in pictures and poems and dreams.”

## XIV

### THE SPIRIT OF ROMANTIC COMEDY

(1912)

I HAVE always held that, like art and unlike science and law, philosophy is essentially a matter of personal feeling and consequently of innumerable variations; that, like poetry and religion, it is born anew out of each individual consciousness, rather than out of other men's brains and books. Be that as it may, it is beyond dispute that the most vital philosophies of all, are those uncatalogued states of mind which we call *moods*, so closely related to us and our affairs as we go our various ways, that they are not so much subjects for study in themselves as undeveloped resources for our thoughts and actions, our dreams and creations. They are like ploughed fields of human life, these moods, and if the soil is fertile, and the sun and the rain do their germinal work, out of the seeds of observation and experience may spring harvests of great material and spiritual value. These states of mind need not be merely mental, but may be also temperamental and subconscious. Of such a kind is the delicate, elusive mood I have lately been pursuing. It comes quietly into being from a million vague influences. But however indefinite the cause, of the result it is possible to say that it is a philosophical attitude toward life which we may call, however inadequately, the spirit of romantic comedy.



It is a spirit born of leisure and of pleasurable, purposeless half-hours, such a spirit as the strictly practical people might find it difficult to wholly understand — and tolerate. Nor could it be expected of materialists to regard it otherwise than with suspicion. For it is, in the last analysis, a wistful prolongation of the philosophy of childhood, as sweet and unreasonable a thing as that. Many and many of us there are who, like Mr. Barrie's dream boy Peter Pan, are loath to abandon our lands of make-believe, reluctant to exchange our princely life in the familiar realms of Never-Never Land, where nothing is impossible because everything is untrue, for a rational existence in some commercial city where the elusiveness of our fancies may be soon replaced by the obviousness of ten thousand facts, and where, settled in some comfortable groove, we may scorn to believe in Fairies, demand a reason for everything and by excess of business become dull to the joy of living. In his very beautiful essay on "Child's Play," Robert Louis Stevenson urged us to remember how indifferent we once were to the inscrutable ways of our elders "upon whom we merely glanced from time to time to glean hints for our own mimetic reproductions." "Two children playing at soldiers," he continues, "are far more interesting to each other than the scarlet being both are busy imitating. Art for art is their motto. Not Gautier nor Flaubert can look more callously upon life, and rate the reproduction more highly over the reality." This delectable comment, like many others in the essay, reveals Stevenson's unbroken

association with the dream-days of childhood. Like Peter Pan he never really grew up and out of his dreams. He wrote boys' books to the end and never lost his relish for adventure in life and art. To be sure, he indulged in retrospect and in sentimental philosophising, both prerogatives of the mature mind. But the spirit of his art was derived from the spirit of play. The castles built in air by any imaginative child as typically represent the primitive impulse as do the books of Stevenson the inspired expression of a spirit common to both — the spirit of romantic comedy.

What do I mean by this phrase "The spirit of romantic comedy"? Romance implies glamour, a sense of beauty that also hints at strangeness. Comedy implies light-heartedness, a forgetfulness of, or an assumed indifference to, life's more serious affairs. Both romance and comedy imply a recognition of life as drama. Shakespeare expressed the thought and it has become one of the imperishable platitudes: "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." But there is a difference between the dramatic functions of romance and of comedy. When we are young and in love, when some vision of a vanished age flashes like a remembered dream across our path, when we stand on the threshold of mystery, or face alone the imminence of tragic gloom, then romance is close at hand. But when our minds have taken to the open road with purposes as blithe and whimsical and wayward as the breeze on a May morning, then for all the grimness, the strangeness, and the sorrow of the world, nothing seems to really count with us save

laughter. And there is a vast difference between the temperaments of romanticist and humourist. The true romanticist does not need the settings of the theatre to put him in the mood for strutting and fretting his hour upon the stage. He may outwardly conduct himself soberly and with discretion. But behind the closed doors of his mind a sword and cloak drama is constantly in rehearsal. How his enemy writhes beneath the well-turned rapier of his wit! How the fair lady of his heart's desire nestles within his strong arm! Or, if adversity crushes his hopes, if the enemy or the lady humbles his pride, how powerful is his woe, how irresistible his denunciation of gods and men. When all is well with him the world is a goodly place. He responds to its pleasures with a fervent gusto. But if he has been worsted in love or in business, if he has played to empty houses, or if the curtain has descended upon him amid disdainful silence, how "flat, stale and unprofitable" the earth can be for him in very truth! A good lover and a good hater, with a great hunger for life and a nice taste in art, he is, take him for all in all, a good fellow, the romanticist. But he lacks that quality without which no man is safe in our uncertain existence, the quality which would have sweetened him and steeled his stout heart against adversity far better than his clamour of grievances — a sense of humour. Your humourist, in no matter how sorry a situation you find him, is never altogether overwhelmed and comfortless. Fate may have tricked him and left him no more prosperous than those waifs the sparrows. But if he is, like them,

despised — he is also, like them, chipper. All is not lost. He can still enjoy the ridiculous. Not knowing where we are, or why we are, or what we are — life, he says, is a huge joke, not to be taken with such a deep sigh and such a long face. Oh, he is a man the sad and weary old world could ill afford to do without — the humourist. But is there no soul in him? Will nothing ever make him serious?

Fortunately the Creator quite frequently blends the types, and it is difficult to say whether we are more indebted to him for the romancers with a sense of humour, or for the humourists with a soul for romance. Most of the really great poets and thinkers belong to the first category and to the second, the universal humourists whose great-hearted laughter has been the world's most genuine wisdom. Art, too, has flourished because some men have been endowed with both a sense of humour and a sense of glamour and the quality of art thus produced is of a most subtle and fascinating quality. Comedy in the arts, if allowed to run its natural course, tends to humorous situation and expression, romance to tragedy or at least to melodramatic incident and action. But tempered, the one by the other, we may expect not necessarily either a humorous or a romantic story but a mood, an intellectual flavour, a dream-like fabric in which humour and glamour are so interwoven that the effect thereby produced pleases us wholly by reason of its indefinite emotional quality — seeming to sound responsive chords of intimate feeling long silent within us. This romantic comedy can express itself



merely by suggestions, conveyed through symbols of colour and form, of sound and measure, of musical, colourful and meaningful words. It may be fantasy, satire, make-believe. It may be a little faded in colour or indefinite in outline, as are all composite things. Almost might one compare it to an observation that becomes transformed in the describing or to a dream of the night that takes on new meaning in the light of day. The country parties that Watteau depicted seem oppressed by a vague, insistent melancholy, yet this sadness of the artist's spirit he disguised by a semblance of vivacious gaiety. The little street scenes and smaller landscapes of Décamps appear, at first sight, mere trifles of colourful and pleasant humour. But soon enough they reveal to us their truly Oriental witchery.

When the romanticist is endowed with a sense of humour, he may still wish to hold the centre of the stage, to go a-questing on some senseless, perilous mission, his every nerve a-thrill with the possibilities for glory and the zest of the crusade. But now the worst foe to his self-esteem, the greatest peril in his path, is that he might appear ridiculous to himself. When the humourist is endowed with a sense of glamour, he may still desire to see the world, just as it is, without any such deceptive properties as limelight. He may still wish to laugh away all the froth and sham of sentimentality and bombast. But there comes a time when his laughter at day-dreams rings hollow and false; when he, the jester, would cherish a vision of the golden age and in the moonlight be a



Romeo. With his wit he has held men to the Realities, but the Realities have played him false. As he looks back upon his life the day-dreams seem the most vital, certainly the most beautiful part of his existence. He has, let us say, amused men with his nonsense. He has said that everything in life is wildly ridiculous; that cows might any time take to golf in the pasture or to polite conversation with the milkmaid. Why not? Stranger things have happened. But now he does not laugh. He says to the romanticist, "You are right; there is a glamour about this mad old world that haunts me as it has haunted you." Everything is indeed possible to us because our minds have dreams and our spirits wings and the realities cannot confine us. "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." Let us return to the spirit of our childhood. Let us make believe. And so to humour there is added the sense of glamour, and to glamour the sense of humour; and because the spirit of man must expand and express its joy in the magic of this mysterious world, Nature supplies the materials for creations of mimetic and imaginative beauty, and Art comes into being that a richer life may result.

It was that prophet of self-culture, Walter Pater, who said that "the basis of all artistic genius lies in the power of putting a happy world of its own creation in place of the meaner world of our common days." In other words, art is not a reproduction, but a transforming representation of life. Whether the artist has treated his theme in a realistic or in a ro-

mantic fashion matters little, his function has in either case been a representative one, representative, not necessarily of his observation, but of himself. Perhaps he has sensuously and thoughtlessly celebrated the beauty of his subject in sound or colour or clay. Perhaps he has criticised it in one of its phases, expressing through the medium of his particular art his particular thought and feeling. How often we hear it said of some dramatist, novelist or painter who is rigorously imitative and impersonal in method — “this is not art, this is a slice of life,” or some such phrase. Nonsense! We cannot possibly rival Reality with our realism. All we can do is to represent, each of us his own impression. If the representation is close to the reality, there remains one insuperable barrier between, and that barrier is the artist. When shall we learn that Art is not so truly the reflection of Nature as of human nature? Let the different schools then cease to wrangle. The fit shall continue to survive the unfit as it was in the beginning and all who are true artists, whether they are romantic or realistic, subjective or objective, shall perform fundamentally the same function — that of transforming the meaner world of their common days into a happier world of their own creation. Why a happier world? Because art implies joy, not necessarily in the thing expressed, but in the means, the glorious possibility of the soul’s expression. Where there is no soul there is no art. It is from the alembic of the soul that the essence of truth emerges yet more true, and of beauty yet more beautiful.

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*suivre mon rêve.*" To pursue one's dream — through a mocking or at least indifferent world — is not that the spirit of child's play, the spirit of art, the spirit of romantic comedy? <sup>1</sup>

There is one essential difference between this spirit in child's play and in the mature arts and moods of men. The make-believing child, as Stevenson said "spends three-fourths of his time in a dream and the rest in open self-deception." But to grown men and women the living of their own lives is drama enough. It is one of the compensations for growing up that with the larger wisdom of the years comes the delicate appreciation of the poetry that is the soul, even of science, and of the mystery that abides even at the open heart of truth. Many of us, it is true, find unconscious delight in returning to the point of view of our childhood, revelling in certain stage properties of romance as the child revels in his cardboard castles and tin soldiers. But such pleasure is now our pastime, no longer our philosophy. And even when we are most romantic it is not, in the old sweet way, for the sake of the romance, but professedly at least, for some more serious purpose. The birdmen who fly on their man-made wings up, up to a dizzy height into infinite cloudland — they are not flying for flying's

<sup>1</sup> This is one of the passages which I find difficult to reprint. The style of Ménard seems to me now so academic — so characteristic of a certain type of scholarly, serious but uninspired work which we expect to see at the Salons, that I wonder how I could have been so moved by it. Classic landscape is a noble thing at its best in Poussin, Claude, and Corot. It seems that even in a derivative man like Ménard the recaptured spirit of antique art and of pastoral poetry tended to blunt the edge of my critical faculties.



sake in spite of the wild joy of their adventure. They are solemnly establishing the supremacy of Man over the Natural powers of Air, just as other conquerors have long since established his dominion over the natural powers of Earth. What make-believe adventure could be more romantic than such calculating calm business as that? But although I suppose every one can see the glamour in the life of the aëronaut, it is not so easy to appreciate the romance of the average uneventful existence. A certain philosophy is necessary for such deep perception and few of us have time now-a-days for philosophy especially when it is not definitely formulated in books. Yet such a state of mind is the best sort of an equipment for the knightly ordeal of life. It is obvious that the man for whom life is a drama will take more pains to play a hero's part than the man who just submits to a period of forced labour and imprisonment, or joylessly squanders an embarrassment of time. I read the other day, in a very readable new book by Mr. Holbrook Jackson, that "Gilbert Chesterton possesses a toy theatre of which he is not only sole proprietor but scene-painter, playwright, general manager and manipulator, all rolled into one. His favourite play is 'St. George and the Dragon' which may be taken as a symbol of his own life and point of view. The play's the thing, but the play is the eternal play of light triumphing over darkness. In real life Chesterton goes forth every day to slay the Dragon of Despair. That is his romance — that is his joy. And his faith forever tells him that all his comrades shall ulti-

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MONUMENT OF CANGRANDE

*By an Unknown Sculptor*





mately meet to drink with him 'from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.'"

Ah, yes, life is a drama of humour and of glamour and death is the tremendous climax. The spirit of romantic comedy regards death with the most eager curiosity. That painter of oft-times grotesque imaginings, Arnold Böcklin, in a remarkable portrait once imagined himself overtaken by the grim messenger. Wide-eyed, alert, every sense awake, "a-tiptoe on the highest point of Being" he listens to the thrilling secret told in music to his ear. Strongest is he still among us and wisest who can thus bear himself without fear and without reproach, and go forth to conquer circumstance high-spirited and happy-hearted. One of my richest memories of the memorable old town of Verona is the tomb of the most illustrious of the Scaligers, the host of the exiled Dante, Can Grande. His effigy on horseback, horse and man in full battle-armour, need not be taken as his true image. But this is no ordinary tomb. There is an idea in the statue, a tribute to character, as if the mediæval sculptor had been stirred by the inspiration of a great man to the expression of a great thought. The conqueror's helm has been thrown back and we behold him on his way to battle, yet grinning in the very face of Death with the joy of a single merry moment. Indulgence then in the spirit of romantic comedy is not merely a luxury for the dreamer of dreams. It is to be well-armoured for our brave adventure.

For romance is not dead nor can it die —  
Until the springtime lose its fragrant breath,

When in the light of love all things are fair,  
Until no more Man hears some battle-cry,  
Until he goes no more to meet his death  
Into the Dark dauntless and debonnaire.

## XV

### ROMANTIC COMEDY IN EARLY ITALIAN PAINTING

(1912)

IT is a natural but deplorable tendency of the historian of art to emphasize the production of a master, and pass quickly by the work of his pupils and immediate followers, on the assumption that they must be merely imitators, with nothing of their own invention to consider. This is a mistake, both because of the injustice often done to the artist thus belittled, and because it is often impossible to gauge the entire artistic aspiration of a remote century by the study of only two or three of its more outstanding creators. Giotto is now estimated at his true worth as a man of exceptional genius, endowed with an amazing instinct for the decorative and the dramatic. He inaugurated naturalistic observation and may justly be entitled the father of modern realism. He discovered all that we know about space composition and expressive design with contours and deserves with equal justice to be called the father of modern mural decoration. His soul was deeply stirred by the drama of human life, especially as symbolized by the life of Christ. To express great moments of great emotion, this was his aim. With an instinctive understanding of the limits of pictorial expression, he never attempted to depict more drama than the eye can see at

one moment, and with even more perfect regard for architectonic integrity he maintained the flatness of the walls on which he painted instead of trying to stand out from them in relief or to break through them with light and shade as his successors were to do. Well may we wonder at the untaught genius of the man. Yet in his very greatness as an artist lay the cause of his incompleteness as an initiator. In his noble purpose to get directly to the heart of his dramatic conceptions and omit irrelevant detail, he held to a noble indifference to all the inanimate objects of natural beauty and to all the trifling incidents and casual momentary appearances of the actual world. So mediæval and ultra-modern was he in his æsthetic point of view that he never allowed himself to be merely entertaining, and was quite unconscious of a need for a background to his human drama. And so we are confronted with the paradox of Giotto's art, which is also the paradox of the mediæval mind, a splendid emotional energy converted into an impersonal symbolism by its disregard of man's relation to his surroundings. If Giotto's followers had been merely imitators, there would have been no familiarity with and appreciation of the pictorial possibilities of life itself. There would have been none of that romantic glamour cast over the realities by personal vision, which constituted the many-sided charm of the Italian Renaissance.

The frescoes of Benozzo Gozzoli in the Ricardi Chapel at Florence, unlike the frescoes of Giotto in the Arena Chapel at Padua, represent no culmina-

tion of the spirit of the Middle Ages. Nor are they prophetic of the decoration of modern times. Here we have only the buoyant, healthy, imaginative childhood of an art that is happy in the unstudied and unsorted charms of the present moment and content to be gay and thoughtless with the youth that comes but once. Benozzo was everything that Giotto was not, and nothing that he was. He had no conception of pictorial unity nor of the well-proportioned design of a given space. He was stirred by no great emotions, and penetrated to none of the essential significances. So fond was he of just the things Giotto despised — the inanimate objects of natural beauty, the trifling incidents and momentary appearances of the visible world — that these things were crowded together on his pictures with the most boyish disregard for consistency and the most obvious ignorance of that first æsthetic principle, selection. Decidedly, Benozzo was no great genius like Giotto. Yet he loved the gaiety and the glamour of life, and he had a vague idea that his art could not be better employed than with representing this gaiety and glamour, as much of it at least as he could afford to paint with the colours that his patrons of the house of Medici provided.

This interest in life, for the sake of its pleasantness and beauty, was the seed from which was soon to flower the Renaissance of Italian painting. It by no means originated with Benozzo but with the contemporaries and the imitators of Giotto. For although the master himself seems to have had little interest in the external aspects of the earth, yet we find Alti-



chieri at Verona drawing a little group of soldiers in the North Italian armour of the period throwing dice in the very shadow of the Cross of Calvary, and at Siena in the Palazzo Pubblico is the famous fresco by Simone Martini of a stout dignitary riding forth to battle on a weird charger, along castle walls bristling with spears but ever so much smaller than himself. In the adjoining room the allegories by Ambrogio Lorenzetti are chiefly interesting for their historical suggestiveness. Yet they reveal true powers of observation and an awakened sense of the pictorial. Farmers are depicted coming through the gates of fourteenth-century Siena from the wide harvest fields with their fruit and grain packed on the backs of donkeys. Under the grim brick battlements they pass on into the streets of the prosperous town. Through the open door of one house we look in upon a lecture. In another corner a group of children have joined hands and are dancing in a ring. Then came Paolo Uccello, a bold initiator with a true decorative and romantic spirit. His battle scenes are, as illustration, ludicrous. The thick-necked horses rear and plunge about amid a welter of pikes and lances, resembling the wooden animals of the merry-go-round and the nursery. But the subject is a most daring and difficult one from a technical viewpoint.<sup>1</sup> That such subjects should have been attempted at the beginning of the fifteenth century, reveals the spirit of adventure now upper-

<sup>1</sup> A suggestion of deep space is attempted and the first statement is made about geometrical shapes in nature. The result of the experiment is a new sensation in art — the sense of coördinated shapes, lines, and colours.

most in art. The monks even were alive to the new interest, for, although Fra Angelico was absorbed in his devout reveries, Fra Lippo Lippi was of the earth earthy, and his paintings of the Virgin and attending angels are full of the fresh physical beauties of girls and flowers. At the home church in Prato, he painted the Banquet of Herod with Salome dancing. Romanticism was well upon its way.

But now let us return to the Riccardi Chapel and linger a moment longer with that delightful person Benozzo Gozzoli. At Pisa he painted an idyllic picture of a Tuscan vintage to illustrate the drunkenness of Noah. Here at Florence the Journey of the Three Kings was converted into an excursion of the Medici and their visitors from the Orient and their retinue of flunkies over the hills of Tuscany. But despite its Florentine farms and villas, the landscape through which passes the brilliant cavalcade never really existed save in the minds of children and other dreamers as childlike as Benozzo. Huge brightly coloured birds fly through the air. There are all sorts of animals about, from plain dogs to camels and leopards, and all sorts of growing things, from flowers and mushrooms to cypresses and stone pines. In the fairylike backgrounds glimmer the red roofs of romantic towns, one of them San Gimignano. But no matter how Tuscan, they are none the less make-believe, for that somehow is the spirit of Benozzo. Oh, but the passing pageant is gay on those dark walls of the little chapel — gay as the images of a dream that leaves the awakening mind blurred and bewildered with the sense

of having seen and done extraordinary things! The joyous mood which inspired the painter in these frescoes is given, perhaps, its fullest expression in the panels representing Paradise. Here the landscape is fairly overrun with pretty angels, many of them making a joyful noise unto the Lord, others skipping along the fields with burdens of fruits and flowers. But one and all of the heavenly maids are wearing peacock wings.

The residence of Benozzo in Umbria for a number of years had a most decided influence on Umbrian art, which was just then in a formative stage. The genial and entertaining spirit of the Florentine decorator, combined with the important technical studies in aerial distances of that greatest of the Umbrians, Piero della Francesca, may be said to have produced the Perugian painter Fiorenzo de Lorenzo, who, in turn, handed on Benozzo's spirit of romantic comedy and Piero's mastery of level light to his pupils Perugino and Pinturicchio. But Fiorenzo himself is an acquaintance well worth making. Once you have met him and marked the unique mental attitude of the man, and you are not liable to forget him. His "Miracles of San Bernardino" are curiously new, not so much in what they illustrate as in the way they illustrate it, with the most engaging irony and with a seeming *arrière-pensée*. What the illustrator of these miracles was really interested in was the impressive swagger of the young men at Perugia. They appealed hugely to his pictorial sense with their chic and shapely legs and their little scarlet caps, and they ap-

pealed even more directly to his sense of humour. It was an inspiration to make these fashionable pretty fellows the audience for the miracles of San Bernardino. How discreetly incredulous they seem as they stand about self-conscious and yet very much at their ease. They are granting the Saint the favour of their patronage, and at the same time amusing themselves mildly. And all the while they are themselves a most amusing spectacle. Too vain and flippant to be religious, too dainty and delicate for warfare, they are at least good enough to look at and to laugh at, thought Fiorenzo di Lorenzo. And the thought itself is a new thought for art to indulge in. It has crept mischievously into a religious picture like a truant schoolboy into church. It is not really a thought at all, but a mood, an impulse to luxuriate in good-natured cynicism and in a sort of masquerading fantasticality. There is something of this spirit in Leonardo da Vinci. There is much of it in modern painting.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the fascination of the new style of naturalistic oil painting, as practised in Belgium and made familiar in Italy by the work of Hugo van der Goes, was blended with the even more potent fascination of classical learning — the new world of ancient dreams and fantasies that seemed to offer the Italians that intellectual and æsthetic liberty which for so long a time they had subconsciously desired. Piero di Cosimo was one of the painters whose sensitive spirit responded eagerly to both these influences from the

<sup>1</sup> Playfulness is engaging in the pictures of such artists as Bonnard, Arthur B. Davies, the brothers Prendergast and Bryson Burroughs.  
D. P. 1926



north and south. Imagination, however, was starved by the æsthetic nourishment of the Low Countries, and the hungry mind of the Florentines turned with relish to the romantic images of Greek allegory and fable. The classical impressions derived from the schools of Florence at this period were of such vaguely glimmering quality as the impressions of dreamy little boys who browse in big books that they scarcely understand. And, just as children grasp most eagerly images that seem to them most strange and startling, so the early Florentine classicists were drawn rather to the fantastic symbols of Greek pantheism than to the serene spirit of Greek poetry. Pollaiuolo drew and painted naked figures in violent action. Pass in London's National Gallery from the portrait by Piero di Cosimo of a knight in armour with the Piazza dei Signore in the background to his well-known "Death of Procris" in the adjoining room, and note how a self-assured though restless realism may easily develop into an immature appreciation of romance, and in so developing, become in a sense less successful but infinitely more important. For in this quaint and delightful Gothic conception of a classic story, a poignant note is sounded, as of indefinite longing and of haunting experience. In the foreground we witness the inarticulate suffering of a faun at the death of his well-beloved. Procris is cold and still, with the bright warm lights and colours of the spring-time all around her, and her woodland lover and faithful dog wistfully mourning the pity of her fate. The clear bright enamelled colours of the flowers and grasses and the



beautiful blue background of lake and sky have a Flemish origin, and for a similarly naïve expression of romantic feeling in the telling of a sweet and simple tale, one must see the pictures of Saint Ursula's pilgrimage by Hans Memlinc in the quiet hospital of Bruges.

The classicism then of Pollaiuolo and Piero di Cosimo amounted simply to a hankering for greater freedom of imagination and a greater chance for technical innovation. The Greek spirit was really as alien to these men as to that other more distinguished dreamer of ancient dreams, Sandro Botticelli. Writers in commenting upon this master invariably use the same words and phrases — "classical rhythm," "mediæval mysticism," "intense sensibility," "yearning for an intangible something." There is a passionate anxiety always noticeable in this artist's work to discard the actualities and the appeal of the senses, and return to a Greek world of abstract thought or an early Christian world of disembodied reverie. Yet all this proceeds from a jaded worldliness, a nature prone to self-indulgence in the luxury of moods. The reason for Botticelli's popularity now-a-days, and that of Aubrey Beardsley's master Pollaiuolo, is that we thoroughly understand the unquiet mind of such men. Rossetti and Burne-Jones expressed the same vague feelings but they only reminded us, not that they belonged to the fifteenth century in Italy, but that Botticelli and Pollaiuolo belong to the nineteenth century in London, or in any other place where life has become too complicated to be entirely healthy. And yet the

disillusioned melancholy of the neurotic artists is synonymous with a very vivid sense of life's glamour. And in the end their thoughtful works, so sad in spirit, so often tragic in temperament, have that lyrical quality of rhythmical *line* which serves to steep the mind in a beautiful dream of life's magic and its masquerade. As I sat before Botticelli's "Primavera" at the Florence Academy I felt its linear fascination quite overcoming a cherished prejudice. I realized also that although Botticelli was not a great colourist, yet he was, in a very true sense, an impressionist in his use of colours.

On my first visit to this picture several years ago I scribbled in my note-book the following improvisation: In the twilight of this dim, mysterious wood where the spirit seeks to dwell when haunted by a sweet unrest, it is fitting that the air should be so silvery green, like sea foam in the mist, and that the garment of the month of May should be bedecked with flowers, and of the maidens three a veil of sunflushed dew, and of the Goddess of Love, with her fullness of knowledge and fruition of desire and unsatisfied yearning, in the colour of the full-blown petals of the rose. That life is sweet in spring-time but with an oppressive languor or foreboding, the painter seems to say. The mind turns back upon itself and dreams its dream with little apprehensive thrills. Such is the dawn of love in Botticelli's dreamland. We all know the type of mind that he so loved to brood upon, the type that luxuriates in melancholy and takes excitement wearily. People who live like this never quite

learn to discount the waywardness of their moods. They are always hungering for thirst and thirsting for hunger. They can always find a pleasure masquerading in their pain and a sharp-eyed pain lurking ambushed in their pleasure. Like the low, wild music that stirs us with uneasy rhythms to emotions that we cannot explain, this picture of Botticelli's would lead us, lure us, out of all peace of mind forever. Can this be the joy of living — this languid dance of the maidens beneath uplifted arms? No, for they move as move the deep sea waters, fitfully. And the eyes of youth, they are troubled eyes, afraid to be so happy. And the month of May strews flowers over the earth, but withholds some unkind secret all her own. And behind the young tree trunks the air is silvery green, like sea foam in the mist.

The intellectual appeal of Botticelli is only a little less modern, a little less for all time, than that of Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo was apparently the first painter who dared to think of the immensity of nature, the miracle of human individuality, the riddle of life's mysterious ebb and flow. His scientific instinct was amazing. His hunger for reality was insatiable. His sense of romance was sure. Almost overpowering seems his genius, whether we think of him as the seer anticipating modern inventions, dreaming of the way that men should fly, or as the poet of the secret heart, the artist who loved to watch the undercurrent of deep waters, and in the slow smiling of women to perceive the swirling eddies at the depths and bubbling ripples on the surface of the soul.

His landscapes are very wild and strange, blue-green in tone and full of rocks that the eternal streams have worn away. Hushed are these haunts with the wonder and the terror one might feel, as Pater suggested, in the caverns at the bottom of the sea or in other "places far withdrawn." But they are only backgrounds for the greater mystery of human life — sometimes a group of wistful women, and little children playing — sometimes a woman's portrait, very exquisite, like that of the incomparable sphinx, Mona Lisa. Half at least of the fascination of this portrait lies in the tantalizing enigma of the lady's smile. Many an interpretation is possible, and each, for the time, seems convincing. Was she a masterful magnificent woman with cruel eyes, directing her underlings through plots and counterplots, smiling disdainfully at their weakness of will? Or, is not her subtle expression, after all, one of weariness and remonstrance, the look of a serious, patient woman's long-enduring of the giddy whirl of revelling Florence? In her grave morality might she not have been a convert of Savonarola's? And yet could she have been a good woman with such eyes? Surely she had experienced many things and sheltered many secrets. And judging from the little twitch of malicious amusement at the corners of her mouth — people might think of her what they wished, but her secrets they would never know. When I think of her, it is not lightly, to speculate about La Gioconda, what she might or might not have been, but to brood upon the eternal woman that she symbolizes and upon the fantastic background



that symbolizes the glamour-haunted hiding-places of our own souls.

Ucello and Pisanello, Piero della Francesca and Pollaiuolo, Botticelli and Da Vinci are chiefly fascinating and important because they introduce new experimental phases of artistic expression. Ever since Giotto, pictures had been more or less imitative. Whatever romance pervaded this immature naturalism was a matter of temperament on the part of the artist — an exuberance of gay spirits in Benozzo Gozzoli, a keen sense of the fantastic in Fiorenzo di Lorenzo. But soon enough this increasing indulgence in the display of romantic temperament made possible the genius of Botticelli, who, diverted from life by his infatuation with learning, may be said to represent “the particular moment in history when the mediæval was aspiring to the classical with infinite though ineffectual desire.” Da Vinci, at the same moment, represents the romantic temperament, no longer seeking beauty on the outside of things, like Lippo Lippi, nor in the realms of metaphysics, like Botticelli, but in the deep places of human consciousness and experience. Pictorial art had become thoroughly subjective, not unconsciously but deliberately and with clear comprehension of art as a means for presenting indefinite impressions and effects. This subjectivity, however, was more intellectual than æsthetic. To appreciate Botticelli one should bear in mind the confusion of influences in Florence at his day. One should think of Lorenzo di Medici and La Bella Simonetta and Savonarola and the revived legend of Aphrodite



rising from the sea. To appreciate Da Vinci one should know his life from Vasari and his profound adventurous intellect from his writings. Painting, therefore, was not yet capable of appealing directly to our sense of sight, independent of the mind and its associations.

The independence of the eye which enables painting to be regarded as a self-sufficient creation, not merely as an illustration of a story or a dogma — the philosophy, in other words, of art for art's sake was first proclaimed by the Venetians of the Renaissance, by Giorgione and by Titian. But we may find its principles being almost unconsciously absorbed and professed in the later works of the founder of the Venetian School — Giovanni Bellini. Perhaps it was from the glorious marbles and mosaics of San Marco or from the precious ornament imported from the Golden East that Venetian painters learned, even in the earliest period of Byzantine church decoration, to regard colour, as we now regard music as, in itself, a language of the emotions. The new oil medium which Bellini was the first Venetian painter to employ was practised by him with such inspiration in the giving of richness and transparency to his tones, that the actual technique of painting took on a significance and a dignity which hitherto men had only dimly apprehended. Beauty of a strictly æsthetic kind was slowly but surely formulated in the work of this master of old masters. Appearing at first in the clear mountain air and sunset splendours of landscape backgrounds to most dolorous pictures, it came in the

end to make these backgrounds of equal importance with the figures in emotional expression.

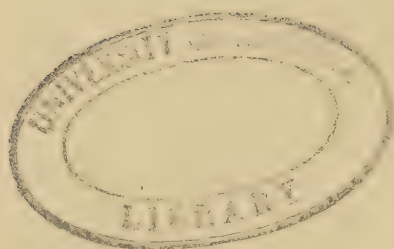
The little picture of madonna and saints on a platform overlooking a lake, in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, is commonly regarded as an allegory involving the Tree of Life. Yet what it means I neither know nor care to know. It may be that the painter did have some meaning to express, in which case he failed to make his idea intelligible. Any well-conducted tourist might with sufficient reason disapprove of the incoherence and improbability of the conception. Would saints, for instance, ever meet in quite so disorderly and casual a manner? Could Saint Sebastian have possibly looked so bored and nonchalant, even for a moment? "What's the use of posing anyhow?" he seems to be thinking. "There are so many other saints at this party, that to be stuck with arrows appears to be no distinction at all." I have an idea that Bellini dreamt this picture. Perhaps just before he fell asleep he had been marshalling in his mind the images of the various saints he was commissioned to paint. In his dream they had all assembled to discuss the arrangement of the picture and many other things beside. Even Saint Anthony in his cave was within speaking distance of the marble platform on which the madonna and saints were holding their informal conference. In the centre several babies were playing around a tree, the Christ Child one of them. For, tired of the grown-up talk, He had left His mother's arms. It was all then very obviously a dream, with its confusion and its artlessness. But it was a delicious

dream, for the platform overlooked a little limpid lake that mirrored the most fantastic rocks, agate-colour in the shadows and old ivory in the light. A canopy of red sheltered Our Lady, and the dreamer wondered whether, upon awakening, he would remember how rich a red it was. So impossible was it to make sense out of the proceedings on that platform that the dreamer just kept looking with joy at the wonderful colours and at the saints with much surprise — as they seemed to act in ways so human and unself-conscious. After all, why shouldn't they look like this in pictures instead of always posing around a throne? Out of the jumble of such riotous thoughts and images, I like to think this little picture grew. It has about it the magic of dreams. Its thrilling colour, its bewitching nonsense, its mood of complete detachment from the actual world, all seem to testify that this is a dream come true — a phantom of sleep remembered and given perpetual life through the newborn magic of art. What does it all mean? I neither know nor care to know. Interpretations are no longer necessary as they were with the dreams of Botticelli and Da Vinci. The humour and the glamour that pervade this apparition are meaning enough for me.

The spirit of romantic comedy, therefore, was at last given immortal expression with the help of the spirit of art for art's sake. Giorgione and Titian then emancipated themselves completely from the rule of the Church, and in giving free play to their fancy, expressed their personal taste and temperament. But these great romanticists deserve separate considera-



THE DREAM OF ST. URSULA  
*By Carpaccio*





tion. There were other painters of the Quattrocento whose important function it was to connect the romantic impulse of the inspiring Bellini with the romantic achievements of the Venetian Renaissance at its height. Such painters were Cima da Conegliano and Vittore Carpaccio. Although Cima's themes were usually ecclesiastical, occasionally we come upon romantic improvisations. At Berlin there is a little picture of knights duelling on a golden plain, and at Parma, Endymion lies asleep on a wooded knoll overlooking a peaceful valley. In his last period Cima emulated the brothers Bellini and Carpaccio as a painter of sumptuous Venetian pageants. But this was Carpaccio's particular field, especially when the ceremonies could be made to represent not merely scenes but stories. He had no conscience whatever in regard to the law of pictorial unity, crowding his surfaces with literary incidents. Yet he is so delightfully suggestive and so stimulating to our historical dreameries, that we gladly forgive him and even love him for being so attractively himself — ever the troubadour and teller of tales — ever the sweet-souled, high-spirited observer of a wonderfully spectacular life. And when upon rare occasions he painted a small easel picture — how good it is in colour and light! There are a few scenes from his fluent brush with simple domestic settings, almost Dutch in their fidelity to fact, although pervaded by a sentiment that is pure Italian in its flavour. It is always with a thrill of real affection for the painter that I think of his picture of little blonde St. Ursula, tucked so snugly under a dull

red coverlet in her high four-posted bed. The mingling of naturalistic observation with the sense of romance and the hint of strangeness makes this picture most delightful. For although in her disquieting dream an angel appears to the little girl, all ominous and mysterious, yet we can see her slippers under the bed, her lap dog dozing on the floor, her books still open on the rack where she left them, and the morning sunshine streaming into the quiet room, fresh and warm with the light of another wholesome day. The subtly interwoven strands then of beauty and strangeness — like the pattern of life itself, charm us with much more than Carpaccio's usually ephemeral interest. Here we rejoice with the artist of long ago in the ageless "life-enhancing" spirit of romantic comedy.

## XVI

### GIORGIONE

(1912-1914)

ON the fertile, pleasant plain that lies between Venice and the Austrian mountains, in the little town of Castelfranco, about four hundred and forty years ago, was born the first modern master of the art of painting — Giorgione. Before him, in Belgium, the oil medium had been introduced. Before him the scenes of scriptural story, the formulas of the Faith, the saintliness of the saints, had been depicted in coloured pictures for the instruction of the people and for the glory of the popes. Before him, in the works of such inspired dreamers and such masters of line and light and shade as Da Vinci and Botticelli, the principles of pictorial art had been moulded and the thoughts and sentiments of our own time anticipated. But if Giorgione was not the first painter to really appreciate the nature of beauty, yet he was the first to care for the beauty of nature. He was the first, not merely to revive the æsthetic spirit of the ancient Greeks who had sought beauty for its own sake, but also to understand that the glorious possibility of art in the Christian civilization was to devote itself to an intensely personal expression. His new æsthetism aspired to no vast abstract beauty but to detect, by means of the individual consciousness, the myriad concrete proofs that the world is beautiful; that there is beauty in the variable expression of the

human face, beauties in the trees and hills of home, in the lights of morning and the shadows of afternoon, in colour and character, in music and old memories, in the evanescent moods of every passing hour. Giorgione was the glad prophet of a new spirit to a world that for many dark centuries had stifled the natural but supposedly sinful craving for beauty and truth, and was, before his coming, ever so cautiously groping its way out of ecclesiastical domains into the boundless realms of personal impressionism. Within the space of ten years from the time that the brilliant boy from Castelfranco went down to Venice, he became as Ruskin said, "a fiery heart to it," the chief inspiration of its pictorial Renaissance. Almost instinctively he grasped the secret of artistic expression, the great principle of Unity, the subjection of parts to the whole. And to-day we are the heirs of a splendid tradition of pictorial liberty and light handed down to the nineteenth century through Rubens and Watteau in the romantic, through Velasquez and Chardin in the realistic line of descent. The historical importance of Giorgione has been underestimated, because of the greater glory of Titian, and because the erudite critics of our scientific epoch have been busy challenging the authenticity of most of the few pictures he left to us.

After Giorgione's death, in the early years of the sixteenth century, when Titian was still faithfully following the example of his revered comrade before developing his own more robust genius, when even the aged Giovanni Bellini, in his altar painting for the

church of S. Maria Chrisostomo in Venice, abandoned his lifelong formality of style for the new romantic intimacy so successfully practised by his former pupil, when smaller men, not in Venice alone but over all Italy, paid Giorgione the tribute of imitation, and no collection of merchant Prince or Doge could be complete or self-respecting without an example of the lost leader's genius, it is not surprising that there should have been a lively sale of bogus Giorgiones, some of them school-pieces by pupils, others copies by contemporary craftsmen. When the science of the modern scholar and connoisseur was directed to this state of affairs a rigid investigation was conducted. Unfortunately Giorgione seldom signed his canvases and there are few existing manuscripts relating to his productions. From such contemporary writers as Vasari we learn of his general characteristics as a man and as an artist; of his love of pleasure and music, of the boldness of his imagination and technical invention, of his great influence over his associates. But no pictures are definitely described. Only four easel paintings can be positively authenticated, and of these, three were seen in Venice by a certain Anonimo (1525-1575) and the fourth is the "Madonna and Saints" in the home church of San Liberale at Castelfranco. The critics therefore had a difficult task passing judgment upon the unsigned and unidentified pictures of obviously Giorgionesque character. Attempting to confine their attributions to works closely resembling the four acknowledged genuine, they overlooked the fact that they were dealing with the inventive genius of a bold



initiator, who was ever seeking new worlds to conquer and rapidly shifting from one style and subject to another. The mistake that caused Crowe and Cavalcaselle to ascribe Giorgione's own pictures to his pupils was due to the fact that they did not fully comprehend the spirit of the man, and the mannerisms of his mind and hand. They merely studied and compared brush strokes and models heedless of two important facts, (1) that, in processes of restoration the original brushwork has vanished from the majority of old pictures, and (2) that Giorgione was constantly changing his models and passing them on to his contemporaries. Therefore the true criticism should pay more attention to the personal and technical peculiarities displayed in an old picture than to its mere substance or the present aspect of its surface. Through all his changing phases there is one spirit in the work of Giorgione, a spirit unlike any other in the history of art. Let us seek out that spirit and understand it. It will be our only safe clue.

The ten or twelve pictures which are now unchallenged and generally accepted as the work of Giorgione reveal the man's mind and the artist's technical peculiarities. In these pictures we find a wide diversity of subjects but a single prevailing spirit, in which is mingled a knight's love of strong men and fair women, a poet's fondness for dreamy moods detached from the indifferent world, and a painter's passion for colour and for light and shade. There are never any jarring notes, the taste is always exquisite, the colours harmonious, the drawing arbitrary but emotionally

expressive. From his very earliest pictures the little Biblical romances that glow, one on each side of Bellini's exquisite allegory at the Uffizi Gallery at Florence, we may miss the distinction of feeling and the scrupulous expression of only the significant forms which we come to expect from the mature Giorgione. But the delight in colour is already apparent and the taste for delicate combinations of tints. There is also evidence in these boyish pictures of at least a dormant instinct for unity of effect. Walter Pater pointed out that two impressions must have been stamped on the sensitive plate of Leonardo's brain in childhood, the smiling of women and the undercurrent of streams. Of Giorgione he might have hazarded another flash of thought; that in his early years he learned to love the magic of evening light and the gleam of polished and reflecting surfaces such as marble, armour and still water. In these precocious achievements, too, we apprehend amid the immaturities and technical imperfections the force of a genius eager for innovation. In Bellini's allegory of the Tree of Life the landscape is more important than the figures. The pupil only needed this example to inspire him to further emancipation from the restraints of tradition. He selected Biblical episodes that could be treated with romantic fervour. Instead of the constrained presence of Bellini's compulsory saints we behold a fascinating glimpse of the brilliant country life of the Quattrocento.

Other Italian and Flemish painters before Giorgione had looked to the many-sided, many-coloured life about them for their pictorial representations, but

never with a thought of making landscape and light, colour and form, symbolically expressive of personal emotions. When in looking at a beautiful thing our pleasure is for the first time stimulated, less by interest in the object itself than by our impression of its beauty, then we have passed from the merely receptive to the appreciative stage of observation. Our eyes mean something to the world because the visible world means something to us. We have developed *creative consciousness*. We have begun to discriminate. It is only when a painter is endowed with at least a measure of this appreciative point of view that his creation can be called a work of art. The significant thing about Giorgione is that his influence seems to represent in the history of painting just what this awakening to beauty means in the life of the individual. The Romantic Idyll which he introduced and which served his lifelong purpose of self-expression brought about a new epoch in pictures. In the palace of Prince Giovanelli at Venice hangs one of the most epoch-making of these idylls. Although an early work it shows an amazing mastery of technique and glows with such realistic light and such fresh jewelled pigments of crimson, silver, and green that it is difficult to believe in its antiquity. Recently an attempt has been made to find a story in the scene depicted. It is, however, my firm belief that Giorgione was impressionist enough to realize the futility of story-telling in pictures. His idylls are only situations and moods of mind. Here we stand sheltered in a shadowy corner

of a quiet wood just as a summer storm makes its presence felt in a lightning flash and the leaves are all a-quiver with a rush of sultry air. But undisturbed by the wind or the threat of rain, in this dim retreat a young woman nurses her babe while the father stands on guard. One feels like an intruder so tender and so intimate is the chord of domestic sentiment.

That delightful critic of Italian painting Mr. Berenson has pointed out that Giorgione's tremendous vogue, a passion that created a voracious demand for the Giorgionesque article, was the natural consequence of a subconscious craving among the Venetians for pleasurable easel pictures to adorn their homes. Giorgione anticipated their desire and at the same time awakened them to the full sense of their need and satisfied it. At the age of seventeen he conceived the idea of representing country parties in Venetia under the guise of representing Biblical episodes. Soon the Bible was abandoned for classic legends from Ovid and Statius and finally a rustic idyll was unhesitatingly offered to the public without any literary association whatever. The landscape backgrounds became popular and important. In them nature was no less idealized than human nature in the portraits. Both were made to yield romantic illusions, pleasurable sensations, a quickened love for the beauty of the world. Thus we find Titian practically repeating the landscape of Giorgione's "Venus" for his own "Noli me Tangere" of the National Gallery in London. The same mellow light falls across the thatched eaves of the same farm buildings in the middle distance, and



in the same luminous, low-lying valley fall the same cloud shadows. But the magic of the "Venus" is the treatment of line, not only in the long drawn undulations of the beautiful body, but of the hills and fields far far away. I can think of no picture in the world so fully in accord with the old Greek ideal for representative art; an art devoted to serenity of spirit and to the selfsufficiency of grace.

Serenity, however, is not the only mood for which this poet painter divined the symbol of expression. There are two landscape panels in the Gallery of Padua which made me catch my breath with delight. The sunset reflections upon the skies and tree-trunks, the sparkling freshness and bosky luxuriance of the forest trees, the almost fragrant suggestion of atmosphere and misty distances, all spoke eloquently to me of Giorgione's genius. The figures are extravagant and crude. Unquestionably they were done by inferior craftsmen. It would be in just such commissions as these panels for wooden chests that the master would give his pupils their chance. The subjects, too, are incomprehensible. Yet in one picture I seemed to feel a unity of sentiment. The apparent agitation of the people moving wildly through a lurid light seemed to hint at deeds dark and strange. It is that hushed half-hour when as the night descends mystery flits in and out and anything might happen. The background is the picture and yet remains emphatically a background. The mind may play with it as it wills. Only the chosen strain of a certain indefinite glamour is suggested. It is just this emphasis upon the back-



ground, this new importance attached to the *mise en scène* that constitutes the character of romanticism in art. The romancer is troubled by no scruples in decorating the truth with a mosaic of colours and an arabesque of lines that at least symbolize the haunting pattern of his own dream. It is his purpose not to instruct the mind and elevate the spirit but to delight both mind and spirit through the senses. If he finds romantic material for his fancy in the visible world so much the better for him. If not, then he will close his eyes and tell himself fairy tales. Now-a-days we know the romance of reality. Nature has come into her own and landscape is no longer merely a tapestry background imbued with romantic suggestion. By uniting their impressions of glamour and truth, Corot with lyric grace and Courbet with epic force have sung the union of nature and the heart of man, employing the most familiar of observations and the most truth-telling of methods. This unity of mood or emotion applied to realism has only come in our age of science. But four centuries ago in Venice Giorgione knew how to express unity of romantic effect. Four centuries ago he laid the foundation for all that is personal and therefore vital in modern painting.

One does not think of Giorgione as a spiritual artist. Across our minds he seems to pass like a gallant adventurous youth out of Venetian legend. And yet his two madonnas of Castelfranco and Madrid have stirred me not only with their beauty but with a certain moral sanity and sweetness. In these two altar paintings Giorgione mastered the problem of how to

make a subject, long hackneyed and conventionalized by tradition, yield fresh interest and inspiration. He realized that the madonna-motif provided the artist with one of the supreme opportunities of pictorial expression. Unlike Titian, Giorgione was not merely a lover of life and of earthly beauty but a genuinely sensitive man. His nature was passionate but also tender, gaily romantic but also deeply reverential. To these madonnas, therefore, he brought a serious mind and a sympathetic, if not a pious spirit. Had the real beauty of the theme been popularly recognized as the beauty of universal motherhood it could have yielded him an infinite variety of æsthetic emotions and left his fancy free to soar. As it was, the symbolical formula for the subject, dictated by the church for the purpose of propagating a favourite dogma, was gladly accepted by this great artist. His aim was to make the unreality of the composition not only symbolical but decorative; in other words, to express the spiritual beauty by means of æsthetic beauty, evoking the mood of lofty thought by the grace and sweetness of the design and the almost musical harmony of the colours. In the painting at Castelfranco, the artist invented a triangular composition, seating the madonna on a high throne, a young warrior in full armour on her right, a cowed and tonsured monk on her left. These figures represent Saint Francis and Saint Libera, but they mean more than that. They mean that Christianity depends upon the knight errant as well as upon the cloistered man of prayer and peace. And the madonna is not merely the mother of Christ. She is

the mother of men, the embodied ideal of man's tenderest reverence. I like to think that for this blessed image Giorgione painted the features of the woman that he loved. The background is a landscape of exquisite simplicity, transfigured by a mellow, tranquil light, as of early morning. This sentiment of nature, radiant with fresh life and hope, has caused these people to withdraw, not in sadness, but in fullness of joy, into the sanctuary of their own thoughts. Again in the unfinished but beautiful picture at Madrid, the mother is pensive, the saints day-dreaming.

Too much emphasis can scarcely be laid upon the singularly formative influence of Giorgione's spirit. His romantic symphonies of colour and of chiaroscuro together with the best pictures of his followers and Titian's glorious "Bacchanals" have undoubtedly exerted a wider influence upon modern imagination in painting than any other pictures ever painted. They remain moreover the last word in pure romanticism, greater than the magnificent improvisations of Rubens, the delicate reveries of Watteau, the dramatic visions of Delacroix, the operatic scenery of Böcklin, and the fading fairyland of Matthew Maris. In their most subjective moods the poetic realists Corot, Inness and Whistler come nearest to the spirit of the Giorgionesque idyll. Whistler's portraits, in spite of their Spanish and Japanese pedigree, have something of Venetian chivalry and romantic charm. But it was the noble mind of Watts that seriously conceived the thought of reviving the emotional portraiture of Giorgione and of Titian's Giorgionesque period. These Old

Masters did not merely record facts. They revealed moods. They fathomed thoughts. Giorgione loved to paint eyes that gaze at us without seeing, eyes that are looking back to some faint memory or forward to some beautiful dream. Morelli suggested that the melancholy Antonio Brocardo at Budapest seems ready to confess to us the secret of his life. Giorgione was certainly intent upon the introspective character of his sitter, and it must have been in a mood of deep insight into the grief that does not speak that he conceived this face and hand so poignantly expressive of a troubled spirit craving sympathy. The kinship of these Venetian portraits to the portraits of Watts in London must be apparent to all serious students. Look, for example, at Swinburne in his pathetic neo-pagan youth, with his earth-red hair and sea-blue eyes, all sensibility and yearning. The spirit of Giorgione is in that picture.

Morelli startled lovers of art by questioning Giorgione's authorship of the famous "Concert" of the Pitti Palace, Florence, and ascribing it, on his own initiative, to Titian. Berenson, Claude Phillips and other authorities now agree with him. Yet in what picture of Titian's, may I ask, was ever such feeling as this displayed? The men portrayed by Titian, with the single exception of the Dr. Parma, are self-contained and reserved as in life — not surprised in unguarded moments of intimate emotion. The inner life was Giorgione's particular field of study. His pupils could imitate his chosen subjects, as with creative ardour he took them up, one by one. But his spirit they



never could approach. It is this which is the touchstone — the final test of what may be accepted as genuinely the conception of his brain. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, in taking "The Concert" as the Giorgionesque standard and formulating their mould of the man's mind and method in accordance with it, were nearer the truth than the usually more dependable Morelli, who was (I believe) led astray by a supposed resemblance of jaw bones, hands and ears to certain other jaw bones, hands and ears done by Titian. The technique is most emphatically Giorgione's, the triangular building up of the lines, the arbitrary glow on the faces, the favourite colour chord of black, orange and gleaming white. But the most positive evidence of the earlier master's authorship is the emotional rapture of the music mood. This picture might be named "The Mood of Music," that language which, saying nothing, means so much, steeping spirit and sense in a drowsy spell where thought may wander where it will provided it pass through the Dreamland Gate. It was Carlyle who said that "Music leads us to the edge of the Infinite to let us, for moments, gaze." Ah yes, it is only for moments. And here in this picture the great young poet-painter has revealed the pathos of that moment, when, as the last chord dies away, the dream of the music lingers a little wistfully in the eyes. The sweet, low harmony has stilled the clacking tongue of the young worldling with the plume, and now behold him sobered in the presence of beauty. But what a contrast in quality the other faces! The older priest has



ceased to play his viol and at the closing strains of the clavichord he has touched the shoulder of his friend to suggest perhaps some new selection. But his eyes are held with sudden and respectful wonder as he beholds in the face that is half turned to him a light of more than inspiration, almost of secret knowledge, as if indeed this man had stood on the edge of the Infinite just for a moment. It may be interpreted as spiritual ecstasy, or as unsatisfied longing, or as unspoken passion — the intensity of feeling that has made this young monk's face so eloquent. But whatever it is, Giorgione has drawn it forth from its retreat. A golden light has come into the dark room and cast its glow over these music-makers. It is a light that fails to pierce the surrounding blackness, an unearthly light shining only where it wills, from an inner source. Such is the light of self-revelation. Only in those rare moments may we know it, when the soul is stirred out of its lethargy, when the swift, strong current of its own thrill fuses a flashing vision in the eyes. Here then we have a painting that so far abandons the conventionality of contemporary subjects as to depict an uneventful moment in any life, when the inner consciousness romantically responds to an evanescent influence of beauty from without; when that beauty is so frail and fugitive a thing that it lingers only on the instant of suspended sound — to leave the soul in another instant — only a little richer for the memory.

But the masterpiece, the culmination of Giorgione's art, is "The Pastoral Symphony" of the Louvre. Denied him by Crowe and Cavalcaselle because the forms



A CONCERT  
*By Giorgione*



were held to be of too free and coarse a type, Morelli has restored the glorious pastoral to Giorgione and all critics are now glad to agree. It is true that the figures of the women lack the grace and refined feeling of Giorgione's earlier nudes. It is also true that Sebastiano del Piombo enjoyed just such robust peasant types of beauty, and that the faces and golden-brown flesh tones resemble his Giorgionesque period. I consider it, therefore, possible that this picture, perhaps the last work of the master, was left unfinished at his death, and was completed by Sebastiano according to the master's original intention. Certainly, the romantic conception, the luxurious colour, the inspired landscape, and the intricate design, are not only the work of Giorgione beyond the shadow of a doubt, but represent the very climax of his achievement.

On this pleasant upland, this soft Italian hillside, the massy verdure of the forest trees seems interwoven, as Pater imagined, with gold thread. And the long-lingering sunshine seems to mellow the very grass and soil to a luxury of warm tones: green, straw-colour and golden brown. At a marble fountain a wood nymph of amber flesh and languorous charms pours water into a basin, listening drowsily to its tinkling fall as the sound of it mingles with the sound of lutes and viols, that the crimson-clad young gentlemen of Venice are wafting upon the golden air, "in profuse strains of unpremeditated art." This is the Land of Make-Believe, eternally young and wilfully fantastic with the spirit of romantic comedy. And in the last analysis,

this land was the dream of Giorgione's short and brilliant life — the goal of his æsthetic aspiration. For here at last the poet-painter found, for the strange, sweet spirit that had haunted his every conception, a pictorial symbol as meaningless and as exquisite as the dream of life itself from which he never wished to wake. A lover of music and of colour, he beheld a vision of the very mind of music, and, while within its trance, he composed a symphony upon the very soul of colour. Come to my earthly paradise — he seems to say; to a land "where the air is always balmy and the forest ever green; where life is but a pastime and music the only labour. Come to my golden land and feast upon beauty, where the richness of tones that thrilled you once for a moment shall be your portion all the day; and the dreams you once yearned to hold shall soothe you into forgetting that there is any such thing as passion or any such thing as pain."

I have said that "The Pastoral Symphony" of the Louvre may be regarded as a perfect expression of Giorgione's spirit. It is even more significant than that. It represents the æsthetic ideal and reflects the philosophic temper of the great Venetian Renaissance from which we have derived the personal impressionism of modern art. Contrast this pastoral with characteristic masterpieces of Florentine painting at the same period — with a madonna by Raphael and a portrait by Leonardo. Raphael's "Madonna" is a thing of grace, as learned, as accomplished, as devoid of individual emotion, as a fine Greek marble. It is a creation of perfect equipment and proportion, pro-



ceeding from a wide culture and a faultless sense of balance. It is an eclectic assemblage of very noble design, and colour, and sentiment, and subject. But no ardour of imagination has gone into its making. No interest in the visible world has made it realistic. No pious reverie nor other-worldly dream has made it, in any genuine sense, religious. No intimation of the elusive glamour that pervades both fancy and fact has made it, for so much as one bright moment, romantic. It is a triumph of hand and eye, but as tenantless of flesh and blood as a slab of mortuary marble. Leonardo's "Portrait," on the other hand, reveals a creator so fascinated by both body and soul, so sensitive to the absorbing interest of reality and the elusive glamour of romance, that in a fever of experiment, his too intricate genius and too learned love of life have stimulated the intellect but only baffled and dissatisfied the sense of sight, to which all pictures must primarily appeal.

Turning back then from either Raphael's Madonna or Leonardo's "Portrait" to Giorgione's "Pastoral," we pass out of the doors of Mind, out of the temple of Thought, into the sunbathed, wind-stirred splendour of the woods and fields in summer. At once we are conscious of the beauties of the earth and, in the very act of appreciation, we become aware of our own mysteriously sentient personalities, of the surging emotions within us which alone can make the beauties of the earth worthwhile. It is with this individual perception of beauty that the painter has to do. Seeking to perpetuate the thrilling pleasure of a moment's

visual impression — he seeks to create a synthesis or unity of expression. The Venetians of the sixteenth century were the first painters to really comprehend the scope of pictorial art, and Giorgione, in his important work of inspiring and inaugurating this new birth of æsthetic understanding was the first modern master of the art of painting.

## XVII

### TINTORETTO

(1913)

**A**T his worst Tintoretto was one of the most misguided and unsuccessful of the Old Masters of painting. His mind was too full of conceptions that were quite beyond the scope of pictorial art. Out of the fire and fury of his imagination he created a chaos of coarsely coloured forms and a bewilderment of things supernaturally seen and done. And yet, at his best, he was one of the most wonderful painters that ever lived and if he had succeeded half of the time in achieving his exalted aim he would doubtless be regarded to-day as the greatest of the great. It was his ambition to present the dramatic visions of his dreams with the power of Michelangelo and the charm of Titian. Angelo's modelling of the human body would lend him the intensity of emotional action needful to the climaxes that his brain conceived, and Titian's colour would supply him with the required grandeur of background and beauty of speech. Only once did he achieve his aim. Usually he fell far short of Titian in charm of colour and of Angelo in plastic power, although he surpassed them both in imagination and creative ardour. The greatness of Tintoretto's genius in a few pictures is beyond dispute. His colour in these masterpieces seemed imbued with identically the emotion of the scenes depicted, and his modelling was by means of light and shade which

he either employed plastically for realizing objects in the round — thus anticipating Greco and Velasquez — or arbitrarily for dramatic effect — thus anticipating Greco and Rembrandt. From the majority of his canvases, we turn away in sadness, much impressed by the learning and the feeling of the man but baffled by his faults of taste and the incoherent complexities of his themes.

With Tintoretto subject was of supreme importance. Giorgione and Titian — yes, and even Bellini before them — although they were the very men who created the romantic spirit in painting, cared more for style than for subject, expounding for the first time the doctrine of art for art's sake. But in those days art was understood to imply beauty, and technical beauty was considered essential to beauty of subject. By technical beauty I do not mean mere dexterity and skill of handling, but charm of surface, charm in the very textures of canvas and pigment. What is it but sheer decorative beauty that stirs us in Bellini's great "Madonna of the Frari," Venice? The design is according to the stiff, expressionless Byzantine model of the Venetian primitives. Yet the rich, deep colours glow like jewels in cathedral light, and the conventional altar-piece is a thing of decorative magic. Now Tintoretto was a facile brushman, and he understood all about colour and chiaroscuro. But his mind was, in a sense, more literary than pictorial. He was chiefly absorbed in representing his impetuous dream-visions, and the materials he chose were often snatched up in such haste that sometimes we marvel

at his immediate mastery, but more often at his deplorable carelessness. It was *the subject* Tintoretto thought of first of all, and if, in his best pictures the technical beauty seems faultless, we feel that it was only so by the happy accident of his spontaneous inspiration.

Tintoretto might have written great drama. He was the most dramatic of painters. He did not merely set the stage like Claude and Turner. He enacted the play. His every figure was made to act its part. He could present a romantic comedy like the "Venus Driving away Mars" or he could succeed with a sublime tragedy like the "Crucifixion." Mr. Berenson remarked of the famous picture in the Scuola di San Rocco that it was full of the impassioned naturalism of a novel by Tolstoi. "Christ is on the Cross but life does not stop. Many of the people gathered on Calvary are attending to their various duties as if it were only a common execution. But all the while we are made to feel, with those few stricken mourners, that we are witnessing the greatest event that ever took place." This impression is conveyed to us directly. In spite of his literary imagination, then, Tintoretto must be judged like other painters as an impressionist who appealed to the eye, at a glance, or not at all. When his dramas failed they failed miserably because the over-elaboration of the parts marred the instantaneous effect of the whole. When they succeeded they veritably triumphed because not only was everything said first of all to the eye, but everything was of profound interest and vital stim-



ulus to the mind and the spirit as well. Every component part of the decoration seemed pervaded by the same inspiring spirit, the colour and design contributing to the thrill of whatever beautiful or breathless moment was depicted.

Light is the chief actor in most of Tintoretto's dramas. He caused it to play many rôles and invariably it was the means whereby the dramatist secured his desired effect. It is really true, as a great painter once said to me — that the modern belief in "light as the life of everything it touches" may be traced to the inspiring experiments of the great Venetian. He was modern in his mastery of foreshortening, perspective and modelling by the brush. But it was his careful study of all kinds of illumination and his power to evoke at will any of these schemes of light as the means for pictorially condensing his dramatic conceptions that he revealed his true greatness. In the "Marriage at Cana" of S. Maria della Salute, the deep perspective of the great banquet hall is luminous with the diffusion of mellow, comfortable daylight. The men are seated in shadow, their backs to the sun, which streams in across the table to fall full upon the charming row of women and girls. There is a pervading sense of pleasure and well-being. The sun is a guest at the feast and glad to shine in such good company. In the "Last Supper" of San Giorgio Maggiore, what a different spirit! Moonlight pours from above into the long dark room, dimly lit by a swinging lamp that smokes. High above the table — up among the rafters, a host of otherworldly visitants swoops in

whirling flight. Meanwhile the disciples are eating, drinking, talking, all intensely excited by the supernatural forces, the presence of which they feel but do not as yet perceive. And the eye is focussed at once on the magnetic Christ, moving with nervous haste and passionate tenderness among his followers, serving and admonishing them for the last time. The mental agitation that is here so subtly suggested is given pictorial synthesis by the struggling of moonlight with the dim and gusty lamplight and the cloud of dense, mysterious darkness overhead. The canvas is now so black that only the thought remains. Yet the decorative imagination is still so potent as an emotional agency that the emotions are deeply stirred and the inclination to be hypercritical is dormant. The best preserved perhaps of Tintoretto's pictures is the "Venus Driving away Mars" of the Ducal Palace. Here the decorative scheme is one of romantic glamour that soothes rather than excites the spirit. A lovely light that glows on the flesh of deliciously rounded arms and knees is in itself a serene and unpremeditated song of joy. And the design is one with the cool and radiant colours — a refreshment and an exhilaration. How supple and strong and at the same time sensitively feminine is the action of the enchanting Athene as she repels the advances of the insolent War God! There have been few finer tributes to the power of noble womanhood.

But Tintoretto's masterpiece — one of the greatest pictures of the Venetian Renaissance is the "Miracle of St. Mark" at the Venice Academy. It is, if you will,

a story-telling picture. But you do not need to know the story nor even the title to enjoy and understand the essentials. The scene explains itself, and at a glance. A thunderbolt in human form has descended from heaven and shattered the sword of the executioner just as his blow was about to fall. The crowd surges around him as he raises the broken fragments for the judge to see, calling upon all to witness that a miracle has taken place. Terrific is the moment's excitement. The sun shines with passionate glow, as only the sun can shine when the minds of men are intent upon the glow of their own passions. And the colours partake of the intense life of the moment. Each one is a separate thrill, and all together, fused in golden air, they vibrate and resound. Such is life's drama at its moments of climax. The particular incident is of comparative unimportance in relation to all that has been and all that will be. But for the space of a moment, to the actors in the scene, it is all in all. The mind has no time to think of consequences and significances. The eye has no time to note details. The emotions alone are in command. It is in such moments that a great painter like Tintoretto, smitten by a thunderbolt of spontaneous inspiration so as to himself partake of the imagined emotions, can even better present the moment, and all that it means, than the author whose words are without light and without colour and form. Endowed in this instance with a power of lighting, colouring, drawing, projecting the forms with sculptural modelling, all employed for a single purpose of emotional expression, and executed



THE MIRACLE OF ST. MARK  
*By Tintoretto*





apparently at lightning speed with inspired economy of effort, Tintoretto's picture is indeed a miracle, but in no ecclesiastical sense.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "It remained for Greco to carry on where Tintoretto left off, to reduce a pictorial theme to its structural, motivating elements, to intensify the lights and the shadows, and to enlarge the unit of design in a consistent, swirling and flaming brush stroke. As the chief inspiration of Theotocopuli, who is now acknowledged to be the discoverer of expressionist painting, we are profoundly indebted to Tintoretto 'the thunderbolt' — the supreme dramatist of colour, line, and light."

D. P. 1926

## XVIII

### SHAKESPEARIAN BEAUTY

(1912)

THE Irish dramatist, J. M. Synge, in the preface to his plays wrote the following significant lines upon the character of his own art: "Richness in modern literature is found chiefly in sonnets or prose poems or in one or two elaborate books (doubtless Walter Pater's) very far from the profound and common interests of life. On the stage one must have reality, but one must also have beauty, not Ibsen's and Zola's reality of joyless, pallid words. . . . In a good play, every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or an apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people that have shut their lips on poetry. Now in Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination, fiery and tender, so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance not given to writers in places where the spring-time of the local life has been forgotten and the harvest is a memory only." It was certainly exceptional good fortune for Mr. Synge to find an untamed, unspoiled corner of his own land where the imagination of the people and the language they use remain so rich and living that it was possible for him, as dramatist of their life, to be sumptuously copious in his words and thus able to express at once poetry and reality in a natural form uniquely compounded of

both the decorative and the representative elements of his art. Nevertheless, it is not to be inferred that all romance has gone out of reality, simply because most people have, in their daily speech "shut their lips on poetry" and become too grown-up and self-conscious to retain their primitive sense of humour and of wonder, their rough, elemental eloquence of fancy and phrase. The *richness* which Synge sought for, as the essential quality in drama, is not after all a strange beauty which can only be reflected in art when it is outwardly visible in life. It is a mood of mind, a potentiality of decorative imagination, a spirit of romantic comedy which all of us may keep fresh and fair in our own lives, provided that we are sufficiently young at heart to be unsatisfied with realities that are "joyless and pallid" and eager for the realities that are "rich and wild."

In the days of mediæval chivalry in Europe, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of Italy, in the Elizabethan Age of England, richness of spirit was a heritage of all the people and consequently these phases of the world's drama are vividly imagined. And yet the Elizabethans did not talk blank verse. In discussing their affairs and expressing their opinions they had "shut their lips on poetry" even as we have to-day. In converting the quite commonplace language of the street into rich and resounding rhythms for the theatre, Shakespeare did not for a moment believe that he was falsifying his expression of reality, but rather that he was expressing infinitely more than the average man was capable of expressing for him-

self. The Shakespearian philosophy did not think of art as synonymous with life nor as a substitute for it, but as something that is meant to celebrate it and enrich it, a magic to lift thought, speech and action beyond the level of every day. Shakespearian realism was not made to copy life but to interpret it; not essentially to report upon things as they are but upon things as they may be in the exceptional moments, as they *would* be if our personal tragedies were always moving to sublime and soul-satisfying climaxes, and if our romantic comedies were always as beautiful as our hearts desired. It was not merely the truth of life then that Shakespeare reflected in the mirror of his immortal dramas, but the intensity of its emotional experiences, the heights and depths of its dreams and aspirations, the contrasts of its colours, and the light and shade of its characters, the reality that is the foundation for all romance and the romance that is the significant part of all reality. The *richness* of life that Synge desired, is perhaps best described to those who love Shakespeare as Shakespearian. We do not need to discover, as did Mr. Synge, such wild corners of the earth as Connemara, Wicklow and the Aran Islands in order to create it afresh. All we need to do is to try to live up to Shakespeare and his love of life as spectacle and story.

It is regarded as heresy now, and I suppose it always will be, to question Ben Jonson's prophecy that the genius of Shakespeare is not of any one age but for all time. Nevertheless it would be quite hypocritical to deny that we to-day have outgrown Shakespeare,

having almost attained to the stature of G. Bernard Shaw. As a matter of fact, although humanity speaks through him now and forever, Shakespeare was pre-eminently a man of his own age — and race. He wrote for the Elizabethan stage, with as much regard for the local and topical interests as our Jewish producers for the seasonable thing on Broadway. His audiences wanted romance, and low comedy and historical tragedy, with plenty of courts and camps and kings and clowns. That his plays were works of matchless genius, only a few intimates like Ben Jonson could perceive. He was simply regarded as a successful playwright, the best perhaps of the scribblers who supplied the required theatrical entertainment. Shakespeare inaugurated no new epoch. Rather was he the culmination, not only of poetic drama in England, but of art in Europe. He was the climax of the æsthetic movement that began with painting and sculpture in Italy. But whereas the Italian genius best expressed its sense of life's romantic glamour in the plastic arts, the English mind found its natural medium in poetry and drama. The Elizabethan Age is not to be regarded as an isolated wonder of creative achievement, but as a final and culminating phase of an international impulse towards Beauty, felt throughout civilized Europe when the enchantment of the Greeks was interpreted at last to the modern world through the ardours of the Italian Renaissance.

It was not the least of Shakespeare's achievements that, following the precedent of Marlowe, he adapted the inspiration of Southern sculpture and painting to



Northern drama and poetry. In his efforts he was sustained by the triumphant British consciousness of world power and world influence. Just as in Italy, the divine fire of Michelangelo and of Titian was bestowed upon the people through the patronage and primarily to satisfy the desires of the ruling classes, so the Elizabethan drama was offered to the English public, but dedicated to and upheld by the aristocracy. What the dramatists of the period reflected most accurately was the life of great men and their ladies, the ideals of these proud people, their tastes, their temperaments. If art had always been democratic, we might never have known that Shakespearian beauty which was anticipated in principle, and partially formulated in practice, by the greater Venetian painters of the *Quinquecento*. The decorative imagination which made them great was the expression of the mental life and philosophy of a breed of powerful men who believed in pride of place and in the survival of the fittest, men of rank, men of action, men of a world of daring deeds, high passions and cultivated tastes, men who really lived tragic romances and really relaxed themselves with interludes of pastoral comedy, men for whom life was full of thrilling adventures and æsthetic pleasures, full of hours vivid with intense emotions. Art then was required to be the expression either of fascinating human character, or of ideal dreamfulness. And so we have the romantic portraits and pastorals of Titian and of Shakespeare.

Titian's "Man with a Glove" at the Louvre, Paris, recalls many a young Shakespearian gentleman

in the gentle revery of his eyes, the kindly but reserved dignity of his bearing. Shakespearian, too, is the handsome Englishman of the Pitti Palace, Florence, who gazes at us with vacant stare as if his thoughts were far away dreaming of a battle or a woman. And the Dr. Parma at Vienna — how the author of Hamlet would have delighted in his mingling of determination and irresolution! With clenched fist and frank, brave eyes, he seems to calculate the approach of a crisis. A momentous decision seems to hang in the balance. Shakespeare would have interpreted his thoughts. Titian left him there on canvas, pondering his problem, about to shape his destiny for better or worse. But perhaps, of all Titian's portraits, the most Shakespearian in its full-blooded idealism, is the equestrian "Charles V" at the Prado, Madrid. The landscape backgrounds of all the Titians in this gallery were painted with the same lyrical enthusiasm which made Shakespeare's descriptions of scenery so decorative. The trees are gold or bronze or green, impenetrable in their shade or dappled by the sun, outlined against the sky or nestled in the valley, according to their creator's changing moods, but always the very sap and strength and bloom of the rich earth. And the drama of the clouds! great billowy bosomed clouds in the deep dark blue of the moving heaven that adds its thrill to the thrilling Bacchanal; melancholy, sable-coloured clouds that lift a little in the twilight, just to leave a space of reflected glory in the sky to harmonize with the dull green tones of the shadowy river-valley and with the dusky armour and

wine-dark trappings of the old World Shaker, as, grim and unconquered, he rides forth to another battle. Now Shakespeare's genius for portraiture had in it elements also of Rembrandt and of Hals. But whereas these Masters appeal to us by reason of qualities very emphatically their own, it is, I think, Titian's crowning glory to Anglo-Saxons, that his sense of the beautiful was "Shakespearian."

Shakespearian beauty is both objective and subjective, both dramatic and lyric, idealism transcending reality, the individual experience justifying the personal philosophy and symbolizing the universal spectacle. Life itself for Shakespeare was a drama, a show upon which he could comment from his unseen position in the wings. But for all his apparent absorption in the words and deeds of others, for all his detachment from his own stories, he was usually out upon the stage expressing through one character or another, one mood or another of his own mind, and indulging his own desire for a selected problem of thought or play of fancy. Being a true Elizabethan, in other words, a vigorous English offshoot of the European Renaissance, he worshipped efficiency and idolized men of action. Yet there is good reason to believe that he himself was no such man. To be sure we have been told that his habits were practical and thrifty. But what we know of his outer life from meagre records, is very little when compared to what we know of his inner life from his dramas. Behind the supposedly biographical sonnets, lurks a vague and unpleasant personality, which is surely a delusion. But in the

supposedly impersonal plays, cannot we find the real Shakespeare most vividly revealed? Was he not, in contrasting one type of character with another, confessing what he was and what he might have been, or would have liked to be? Was there not a good deal of that passion-swept sentimentalist Romeo in his own temperament, in spite of the debonair, devil-may-care philosophy of Mercutio, which he so admired? Was he not capable, like Jaques, of being melancholy amid wholesome country joys, cultivating a perverse luxury of mood in spite of his enjoyment of the way a Touchstone's burlesque could shame his affectation? Was he not emulous of the strong and steadfast Horatio, being himself Hamlet, that ineffectual drifter with the tides of thought, that sweet dreamer of profound dreams, bewildered by a world of ill-considered action? Was he not, most of all, that master of enchantment, Prospero, with his child of art on his lonely island, attended by servants of earth and air, of sense and spirit, Nature yielding him at the last her innermost secrets? To me it seems that the man Shakespeare is a composite of these characters of his own creation. And the Shakespearian world, it is our real world dramatized with infinite truth but enlarged and intensified beyond mere powers of observation through a witchery of decorative imagination, and through a very lyrical self-expression.

But, however disputable my contention that there is a vein of personal sentiment and philosophy underlying Shakespeare's profound studies of character, we must all recognize the lyrical quality of "decorative



imagination" which the dramatist deliberately put on like a costume when he refreshed himself with the composition of a fantastic farce or a romantic comedy. These lyrical plays are not true to life. They contain instead of deep thought, thistle-down fancy, instead of subtle sense, the most irresponsible nonsense. Occasionally in the tragedies Shakespeare introduced scenes and characters of low comedy. These were intended not only as a relief from the tension of profound emotions, but also in order to accentuate the life likeness. In real life we all know the jangling of the sublime and the ridiculous. Protected by his own fine sense of fitness and proportion, Shakespeare's comic digressions were actually made to contribute to the tonal scheme of tragic plays. Polonius, for instance, gives Hamlet splendid opportunity for puncturing the bladder of worldly wisdom and the First Grave Digger adds just that gargoyle of leering familiarity with Death which reveals by contrast the spiritual beauty of Hamlet's sensitive soul. But such a farce as "The Taming of the Shrew" and such a pastoral as "As You Like It" are unashamed to be sublimely ridiculous and ridiculously sublime. A dramatist takes the same delight in providing good action or "stage business" as the painter in his brushwork of "handling." When acted by such a master of the fantastic as Otis Skinner, the benevolent bully Petruchio is a positively exhilarating person to watch, just as it is exhilarating to mark the incisive sabrestrokes of that Petruchio of painting, Frans Hals, in his genial introduction of a "Laughing Cavalier." As



for Touchstone, I dote upon that precious fool. He burlesques the pessimism of Jaques, and Jaques, overhearing, chuckles "for an hour by the dial" "that fools should be so deep contemplative" as to catch him grinning behind his melancholy mask. And so he is "ambitious for a motley coat" invested with which he would "purge the foul body of the infected world." When the philosopher exclaims "Motley's the only wear," it is not only Jaques, but Shakespeare himself who is speaking. In other delicious scenes Touchstone, to his own boundless delight, parodies the contagion of lovesickness that overtakes everyone in the enchanted forest where "'neath the shade of melancholy boughs" the hours are only measured by contentment and by whimsical fanciful idleness.

Shakespeare's romantic comedies are the perfection of lyrical and they are the perfection of pictorial dramas. It is the underlying function of expressing a single idea or emotion, and of producing a single tonality of effect, that makes all good pictures and all good lyrics impressionistic, and in this sense, "As You Like It" and "Twelfth Night" and "Much Ado About Nothing" are the earliest triumphs of literary impressionism. These dreams of young love and nonsense and mellow calm philosophy, with their backgrounds of sun-flecked forest depths and moonlit palace gardens, are of the same stuff that songs and pictures are made of. They express single moods by means of blended harmonies of sense and sight and sound. We moderns would dispense with a good many scenes of inferior quality and thereby emphasize the beauty of

the whole. But we must remember that Shakespeare was writing for an amusement-seeking crowd which was not yet aware of the æsthetic value of synthesis. It is all the more eloquent of the lyrical unity of mood and the decorative harmony of tone, that in the best of Shakespearian performances these essential qualities have their way with us in spite of the many imperfections, leaving upon our minds exactly the sense of beauty induced by the master's art at its most perfect moment:

Under the greenwood tree  
Who loves to lie with me,  
And tune his merry note  
Unto the sweet bird's throat,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither.

Come to the glowing heart of Nature to hear it pulsing, where we who are lovers may have our fill of the fond familiar sentiment, and we who are jesters may laugh the hours away and from sheer gladness of heart, and we who are athletes may delight in sports that test us, and we who are musical may sing in chorus till the woods resound, and we who have seen too much and thought too much and grown a-weary with overmuch experience, may indulge ourselves with sad philosophy, secretly glad that, on a summer's day, life is so simple and so sweet. Passions at rest, cares that we may forget, entertainment and colour and music and sentiment for us all, each As We Like It — surely out of his largess the Enchanter has created a Land of Heart's Desire.

Essentially then Shakespeare's romantic comedies

were pictorial and musical. Not only did his moods put on colour and form but they also burst into rhythm and melody. The stories were charming in their way, but they were never seriously considered; in no sense the significant part of the creations. For the dramatist's own estimate of their relative unimportance recall the titles, "As You Like It," "Twelfth Night or What You Will," "Much Ado about Nothing." The fact was that Shakespeare usually built the framework for his treasures of decorative imagination out of the incidents and situations he found in trashy English poems and Italian novels. Sentiment on the other hand was, in his romantic comedies, the one thing of supreme importance. But it was a sentiment compounded of (1) a delight in the character of concrete images, lovely or grotesque; in short, a pictorial sentiment, and (2) a delight in yielding to the impulse of song; in other words a natural birdlike sort of a sentiment. And these delights were really identical. The songs are pictures, vividly sketching for us the greenwood tree at the heart of summer or the fairy couching in the cowslip's bell. So also are the pictures musical. The closing garden scene of "The Merchant of Venice" entralls our senses with this double charm. When Lorenzo whispers to his Jessica:

How sweet the moonlight *sleeps* upon this bank,

we do not need the chemical and mechanical illusions of modern stagecraft to create the magic atmosphere for a night of love. The picture is flashed to us in a phrase — a quality of genius that anticipates the

modern word-painting of Stevenson, Meredith and James. When Lorenzo sighs for the wafted harmonies that the night air breathes, we do not need any orchestral accompaniment of low music. There is all we need of music, and all we can bear of moonlight in the harmony of his own words.

It is, however, the glory of Shakespeare's plays that although they may be in spirit poems and pictures, they remain in substance fundamentally and unmistakably plays. The trouble with contemporary drama is its inability to be both dramatic and lyrical. If it is our luck to discover a play that is truly dramatic, it will be insufficiently lyrical, and, if lyrical, then insufficiently dramatic. The romantic dramas of W. B. Yeats are to a certain extent Shakespearian in that they are at once musical, pictorial and cast in a dramatic mould. But Yeats is a symbolist which Shakespeare never was. If we read "The Land of Heart's Desire" with a receptive mind, putting ourselves in sympathy with an untaught, imaginative people for whom Elfland is never far away, even as Shakespeare did when he created Puck for the Elizabethan public, we will be deeply impressed with just the emotions the poet wished to rouse. We will be haunted by visions of Irish faces round the fire, and autumn winds without, of silver starlit streams and the dance of the white feet of fairies. But there is no solid foundation in such a play, as even the most fantastic of Shakespeare's dreams may rest upon. It is not the romance of life's reality which we feel but just the reality of the romantic spirit in the mind of Mr. Yeats.



Far otherwise it is with the dramatic tone poems of J. M. Synge, a man whose conception of art was thoroughly Shakespearian. Synge tells us that he wrote down nothing that he had not actually heard the Irish peasants say. It was his art to recognize the dramatic and æsthetic opportunities that came to his hand and to select and emphasize them by means of his decorative imagination. A recent biographer has written of Synge that "art for him was always an expression of life, but not keyed down to the low pitch convenient for those who live in the narrow streets of civilization, rather of life superb and wild. He would have approved of Gissing's definition of art as 'the expression of the *zest* of living,' the quality which nourishes the imagination by giving it food richer than the fare of ordinary experience." One has always imagined Shakespeare going attentively about Stratford or the streets of London taking notes, here of a striking phase, there of a salient trait of character, sufficiently vivid for the emphatic life of the stage. To-day the stuff of drama is not so ready at hand as it was in Shakespeare's time. Our vitality seems lower; we are prone to think about life instead of living it, so that artists are inclined to deal with special problems rather than with life, just as spectacle or story. Then too, our language has deteriorated. The rift has widened between literature and talk. And so Synge had to go to the Aran Islands and to Connemara and Wicklow in order to find that impulsive eloquence and elemental frankness which he thought essential to the drama which may combine reality and romance. One



must turn back to the great scene where the afflicted Lear and his dear Fool suffer together on the storm-swept heath for analogy to the poignant pathos of Synge's "Riders to the Sea." In the pitiful calm that comes with the completion of her anguish, the old mother of lost fishermen attains to that terrible lone summit above the storms of fate where it feels good to watch and worry and weep no more. Love is a torment. "Sure and no man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied." The fatalism of the pagan world is in this tragedy and a certain *richness* of colour too, curiously *wrought out of darkness* by sheer decorative imagination. For the romance of reality may be found in its most undeniable manifestation in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Big as it was in conception and execution, the theme of uncivilized Ireland was too narrow to yield Synge perpetual inspiration. Before he died, he had turned his thoughts to the retelling of old Gaelic tales, and sooner or later he would have returned to the modernity of which he was so interesting a part, refreshed for new apprehensions of the richness that exists even in modern city life if eyes know how to see.

It is obeying this decorative impulse that the imagination goes high-hearted on its way through the streets of life, loving life all the better for cherishing its own inward existence. Alfred Noyes' poem "The Barrel Organ" expresses the glimmering consciousness of this dream-quality in the minds and hearts of all sorts of people on London's busiest thoroughfares. It is spring. The hurdy-gurdy rolls forth a succes-

sion of good old melodies made sweet by association. Who of us can resist the vague stirring, the swift calling of the spirit of song in "lilac time"? I am reminded of Austin Dobson's "Ballade of Prose and Rhyme":

When the brain gets dry as an empty nut,  
When the reason stands on its squarest toes,  
When the mind, like the beard, has a formal cut,  
There is place and enough for the pains of prose.  
But whenever the May-blood stirs and glows  
And the young year draws to its golden prime,  
And Sir Romeo sticks in his ear a rose,  
Then hey for the ripple of laughing rhyme.

In a theme where the thoughts have a pedant strut  
In a changing quarrel of ayes and noes,  
In a starched procession of If and But,  
There is place and enough for the pains of prose.  
But whenever a soft glance softer grows,  
And the light hours dance to the trysting time  
And the secret is told that no one knows,  
Then hey for the ripple of laughing rhyme.

Mr. Dobson did not mean literally Prose and Rhyme, but the spirit of Common Sense, as opposed to the spirit of Decorative Imagination; the regard for the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing *but* the Truth, as opposed to the craving only for the Beauty of Truth; the pallid and joyless reality of Ibsen as opposed to the sumptuous reality of Shakespeare. When we come upon pictures that seem to sing to us, and yet remain true to the laws of pictures, and lyrics that seem to paint for us pictures, although remaining true to the laws of language, then we meet Shakespearian beauty

and partake of that *enchantment* that is not just life haphazard, but the flower of life, the finest moments of experience, the colour, or music, or philosophy, that is, in itself, *emotion*.

## XIX

### WATTEAU AND HIS INFLUENCE ON MODERN POETRY

(1913)

**W**HETHER we love it or not we must all agree that the art of the eighteenth century was, for the most part, clever, vivacious and superficial. It was an art neither of the people nor for the people. With the passing of the mediæval guilds the plebeian mind ceased to count. Literature and painting were made to express the tastes and sensibilities of the élite, fastidiously withdrawn from the shocks of vulgar reality. It was an age of facile but frivolous culture and accomplishment, of facile but absolutely false connoisseurship, in short the age of the dilettante and his debonair trifling — just to pass the time, you know — the ennui of superfluous time. The classics were quite the rage but brought up to date: Homer done up by Mr. Pope in neat little parcels of rhymed couplets, and in France, the gods and goddesses of Boucher sporting amorously on the walls of my lady's boudoir, Olympian, but in name only, resembling rather the fashionable pretty creatures that, moth-like, fluttered to the royal flame. Nature also was much admired but not in its unadorned roughness — oh, no, no! — trained of course in parks and gardens to an effect tout à fait rococo yet simple enough to set off by contrast the distinction of lords and ladies playing at

country-life in their diverting way. I never see the paintings of Fragonard without a renewed sense of the pity of it — the pity of so much technical knowledge and skill frittered away on confetti and confectionery. Thought was despised. Emotion was in bad taste. The aim of art was to depict the life of fashion, glazing the sensuality that was so much a part of it with a glamorous mist — *couleur de rose*. In his book on French art, Brownell pointed out that although this period of Louis Quinze was in a sense romantic by reason of its riot of unrestrained caprice and its sprightliness of outward manner — yet nothing can be called romantic that is so confined by the artificial spirit of dilettantism. The difference between Giorgione and, let us say, Sir Joshua Reynolds attempting the “grand manner” is the difference between the romance of personal inspiration and the sobering futility of attempting to be romantic when the labouring mind is merely sentimental. But the spirit and substance of the attractive English painting of the period was virile when compared to the effeminacy affected in France. There the cleverness of painters was inherent, but their whimsical swagger of style, their improvising brilliancy of invention, by no means proof of their having freed themselves from convention. It was now the fashion for painting to be capricious. Antoine Watteau had set this latest fashion.

To say that Watteau, like Giorgione, supplied a demand, anticipating the desire of his contemporaries, does not necessarily imply, as has been frequently asserted, that his art is the mirror of his age. On the



contrary — his art, like Giorgione's, reflected nothing so much as his own personality — a temperament particularly sensitive to surrounding influences and at the same time wrapped in a reverie from which there was for him no waking. He was really a solitary, a doomed consumptive, and in spite of the fact that his pictures inaugurated an epoch and anticipated modern art, I have my doubts whether he was really trying to do anything more than just to pass the time like his fashionable patrons, and make himself meanwhile as comfortable in his dreams as it was possible to be in so sad a state of mental rebellion and physical dissolution. It is obvious that Pater, Lancret, Boucher, Fragonard, and the rest were following his lead, carrying on what might reasonably be called the School of Watteau. But what with these imitators had become so vapid and gaudy a style of decoration had been for the man of genius merely the most convenient vehicle within reach for his poignant self-expression. We must of course regret that the frail poet-painter did not break away from the artificiality that almost mastered him, that he did not overcome the weakness of will that kept his work so strictly "*à la mode*." But Watteau was too timid a man to run counter to public taste. He was ever ready to follow the line of least resistance. Since the dainty and the chic were the effects sought after then he would create effects dainty and chic. But in so doing he would express, not the mere emptiness of his subject, when devoid of personal inspiration, but the fullness of his personal inspiration in spite of the emptiness of his subject. From the

Italian operas and country parties of the aristocracy and their life of vain amusement, he would evoke a realm of his own fancy — a realm exquisite with shimmering stuffs of delicate tint, with lovely faces and mandolin music, with woodland picnics and lingering sunsets, with garden comedies fantastic without grossness and gay amours flirtatious without guile, a realm in which a sick dreamer could share in the essence of all things dainty and chic and in the spirit of make-believe forget his disillusionment and despair. It is the hint we are sure to get of moods that perhaps the painter himself never quite understood, the suggestion we are sure to find that his *Fêtes Galantes* were but symbols of his sad day-dreams that cause the pictures of Watteau to vibrate with more depth of feeling than we would expect from the sparkling colour-melodies he composed. With this dreamer of dreams self-expression consisted in self-concealment, never furtively in a dark disguise, but always with a certain melancholy blitheness, in the most becoming masquerade.

I find a fascinating resemblance between the style and spirit of Watteau's art and the poems of certain European and English writers of to-day. Some of the modern men that I have in mind have been named by one of their own cult — Symbolists. The title will do as well as any other to suggest the purpose of this decorative phase of impressionistic poetry. The symbolist acknowledges that all is mystery and that all is rhythm; that we are all in a dream and that nothing is certain save only that time flies and that its beauti-

ful moments can only be perpetuated through the various symbols of art. It was the purpose of the ancient Chinese and Japanese painters to make their images expressive not of things but of thoughts. Whether they celebrated the majesty of the mountains, or the watchful, many-handed Goddess of Mercy, or the song of a little bird on a tree — mystery was the constant theme. Then the means of expression had also to be mysterious, the explicit form made to vanish in the emotional suggestion. To this symbolism modern artists have been returning. They realize that form is not the end but only the means — that technique must be mastered so that it may no longer be obtrusive and obvious, so that, as in the best music, spirit and substance may be one. And so we find prose that affects us like an invisible orchestra and poetry that is like bird song, verse in which, as Symons said of Verlaine “the words startle us by their delicate resemblance to thoughts, by their winged flight from so far, by their alighting so close.” With the same attentive simplicity with which he found words for sensations of hearing Verlaine also found words for the sensations of the soul— the finer shades of feeling. And that is just the perfection of decorative imagination which, in the dilettante eighteenth century, Watteau, the inspired dilettante, was able to achieve. His *Fêtes Galantes* are the symbols of his own moods, and the philosophy of his art is summed up in one small figure — “*L’Indifferent*” of the Louvre. That graceful young cavalier is chiefly charming by reason of the lurking ennui back of his debonair abandon, the

vague sadness disguised in sprightly silver and rose. And this prevailing mood — though ever so frail and fugitive a thing, seems Watteau's most alluring quality to our appreciative, unimaginary age. In many ways has he influenced modern art. Was he not the first to recognize the prismatic brilliancy of the atmosphere — the first to combine the realistic zeal of Rubens in the study of light and air, with the romantic ardour of Giorgione in the evocation of the personal sentiment? Yet for all his spirited draughtsmanship and vivacious colour, it is the successful *symbolism* of Watteau that makes him most interesting to modernity — his inspired discovery of a peculiarly subtle means of expressing his peculiarly subtle mood. And the mood itself — the mood of romantic comedy — is one that we moderns are able to understand. Modern poetry has been much charmed by it.

Impressionism in poetry is concerned with the production of *effects*, sometimes imitative of other arts, always suggestive of intimate emotions. Watteau's spirit has been translated into verse by almost every poet who is any way sensitive to painting. No one has done this quite so perfectly as Verlaine in his "Fêtes Galantes." Arthur Symonds sympathetically rendered the lyrics into English. Here is one of them.

The singers of serenades  
Whisper their faded vows  
Unto fair, listening maids  
Under the swaying boughs.

Tircis, Aminte are there,  
Clitandre is over-long,

And Damis for many a fair  
 Tyrant makes many a song.

. . . . .  
 And the mandolines and they  
 Faintlier breathing swoon  
 Into the rose and gray  
 Ecstasy of the moon.

Of such a dulcet sweetness is Watteau's luxury of secret pain. The spiritual quality of the colours we only dimly apprehend, and the enchanting forms of gentle blonde beauties and their gracious lovers, we remember, but only as images of sleep. Yet the spirit of the artist who loved the forest trees and open spaces, who waited for the dusk all of the day, and mused of day as at last the shadows lengthened, something of this spirit is here preserved.

It may well be argued that to find only melancholy in Watteau's paintings is sentimentally to read into his art what we have read about his life — a school-girl's privilege. After all, the pictures are outwardly gay and most lovers of Watteau are drawn to him not because he vaguely oppresses the heart but because he lightly refreshes the mind. Detached, by reason of his illness, from participation in the social life that he depicted, Watteau was the better able to realize his dream, deliberately to emphasize the sheer pictorial charm of it, and close his eyes to its vulgarities and vices. Curiously — that is exactly the point of view from which Mr. Austin Dobson so delightfully celebrates the glamour of the eighteenth century. This modern dilettante lives in a little world of his own making: a brilliant little world of powdered wigs, of



lovely ladies and their lords forever bowing and ogling, at the play, or a-Maying in some old-world garden redolent of box and rose. For the air is ever of May. Oh it is altogether too good to have *ever* been true — the poet's pretty ballet-land. And the poet knows it. With Watteauesque graces of thought and style, it is his pleasure to strut about with ruffled elegance and flash of steel; to play with the beautiful Pompadour's fan, heedless of the naughty Pompadour's fame.

In teacup times — the style of dress  
*Would* suit your beauty, I confess!  
 Belinda like — the patch you'd wear!  
 I picture you with powdered hair,  
 You'd make a charming shepherdess,  
 And I no doubt could well express  
 Sir Plume's complete conceitedness,  
 Could poise a clouded cane with care,  
 In teacup times.

It is the very voice of grown-up make-believe — the kind that attitudinizes in fancy dress and luxuriates in play-acting.

Not so very long ago the great French dramatist Edmond Rostand wrote a clever satire on the folly of young people dream-dazed by all the bosh and bombast of moonshiny melodrama. Yet in the course of presenting the idea, there was abundant evidence to prove that the satirist was himself a Romanesque revelling in the actual stage-properties of romance. In fact, before the last curtain, appreciating the futility of further evasion, the poet makes his little Sylvette trip to the footlights, and confide the sentiment that lies behind the satire.

SYLVETTE

Et maintenant nous quatre  
Excusons ce que fut la pièce — en un rondel  
Des costumes claires — des rimes légères  
L'Amour dans un parc, jouant le fluteur.

STRAFOREL

Des coups de soleil, des rayons lunaires  
Un bon spadassin en joyeux manteau.

PERCINET

Un repos naif des pièces amères  
Un peu de musique — un peu de Watteau.  
Un spectacle honnête et qui finit tôt  
Un vieux mur fleuri — deux amants, deux pères.

SYLVETTE (*dans une reverance*)

Des costumes claires — des rimes légères.

. . . . .

As I was emerging from the crowd after hearing "Les Romanesques" at the Théâtre Français last summer I heard an old gentleman, who was crossing the street just behind me, muttering to himself — "Nos costumes claires, nos rimes légères — ah mais c'était ravissant." He was right.

The mellow masquerading spirit then of Watteau's art has been the inspiration, not only of Paul Verlaine and other seekers after old effects and new sensations, but has also exerted the dominant influence over such totally different phases of impressionism as the delicate porcelain-poetry of Austin Dobson and the playful garden-comedy with which Rostand appropriately introduced himself as a romancer to our appreciative, unimaginative age.

Watteau's reverie was always far away from the world of things as they are. Although he dwelt by preference in a paradise of mundane beauty etherealized — even the atmosphere of comic opera delighted his lighter hours. As a child he was fascinated by the strolling players who performed on great occasions in the streets of Valenciennes. Then and there perhaps he learned the æsthetic possibilities of the fantastic. Life was always for him a spectacle that afforded him tender visions and complicated emotions. Nothing ever really happens on the stage of Watteau's little theatre. But the eye finds the rest it seeks in those bosky glades of russet and green, and the lovely colours of the players' costumes amply compensates for their listlessness. They are all idly dreaming, the sweet young people — dreaming of their secret hopes — watching the dawn or perhaps the dusk of sentiment reflected in each other's eyes. And beyond a little pool, deep-shadowed by encircling trees, through a clearing in the drowsy wood the smouldering sunset glows, like passion stilled at evening. It is perhaps the romanticist's highest function to symbolize the more dreamful qualities of human emotion. He believes that when we escape from Fact to find solace in Fantasy — when we create by means of our decorative imagination a more congenial world than reality in which to dwell, then our dreams, however fantastic, our art whatever its symbol of expression, has become for us the truest truth. And so it is the truth of Watteau's sentiment, no less than his illusion of a land beyond place and time, that moves us. For surely

there is nothing more true than weariness, and nothing more true than the desire for beauty, and it was out of the blending of these truths that the romantic comedy of Watteau was made.

## XX

### THIS IS THE CROWN AND TRIUMPH OF THE ARTIST — NOT MERELY TO CONVINCE BUT TO ENCHANT

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

(1912)

IN this short paper I wish I could suggest the connecting link between the apparently separate themes of my book — between Impressionism in the broadest sense of the word and the Decorative Imagination, between the artist who is striving for unity of effect and the artist who produces that effect, not so much for its own sake, as for the sake of a perhaps subconscious yet devoutly cherished philosophy of life. Of all the artists who succeed in their function of impressionism, the ones who have, it seems to me, the largest conception of their work, are the men who use the synthetic personal expression of art, whether objective or subjective, not as an end in itself, but as a means, to enrich and ennoble life with spiritual stimulus, or at least to richly and nobly appeal to the imagination and the emotions. The poet Browning was such an Impressionist. He successfully employed his detached impressionistic point of view as a spectator of life and his appropriate method of psychological and dramatic expression in the cause of his own “dream of a world.”

It is a curious truth known to all art lovers, that





THE FARM — EARLY MORNING

*By Corot*



when an impressionistic style expresses a romantic spirit it is difficult to distinguish one quality from the other. Rembrandt's magic of arbitrary light and shade is of course exactly what we mean when we speak of his impressionism, in other words his art of producing desired effects, but it is also exactly what we mean when we speak of the romance of his personal vision. He employed this magic to reveal the secret of a troubled soul, or the inner beauty of a landscape, or the richness of a dream of colour. Colour modulated by light and shade, this was the technique which interpreted his moods. Nature or human nature, darkening or lightening in moments of elemental exposure, this was the thought which dominated his soul.

It is impossible then to separate the man from the artist. When Stevenson said that the particular triumph of the artist is "not merely to convince but to enchant," he meant that an impressionist should also be a super-realist. It is of course a matter of opinion — a question of taste. Of course conviction is more indispensable to enchantment than enchantment to conviction. It is only by reason of his perfect genius that Corot enchants us with his later landscapes which are, after all, conventional in composition, neither altogether fanciful nor altogether real, and of a sameness in tone, sentiment and subject. Colour chords in silver and dark green, the harmony of wind-stirred leaves and glistening dew, the essence of all that is delicious in misty dawns and twilight in the woods, willows that cast their shade where the ripples play along the still waters of a little lake, a distant

farmhouse luminous with sunrise, a shepherd piping to the late lingering afternoon, these are the only general impressions that the name of Corot conjures up. But they are impressions that the world cannot do without. No wonder those little dream-people dance and frolic in the glade, mad with the witchery of it all. For it is Fairyland, the Fairyland of an enchanter whose enchantment was impressionism, the Fairyland of the good old Corot whose jovial pipe-dreams transfigured Reality and whose incomparable eyesight realized Romance. Once more I must quote Stevenson, "Mirth, lyric mirth, and a vivacious Classical contentment, these qualities are of the very essence of the better kind of art."

But perhaps the most interesting thing about a Corot landscape is that it makes us feel that the beauty of the scene is evanescent and about to disappear. In another moment all will be changed. The hush will be broken. The fairy footfalls will cease. The light will fade away, or grow, and lose its tenderness. That exquisite colour in the sky, it cannot linger. For all things pass, the fairies of our dreams, our youth itself, and music and sunsets, and those dawns or twilights in the woods when our wistful souls are at rest. It is not Death we think of but simply Change, like sleeping and waking. We are happy in Corot's borderland, but happy with the vague unrest, the vain regret we feel in listening to music. Spirit and sense are at one, but only for moments. Art marvellously perpetuates these moments, but art itself must change. Why then the spirit of romantic comedy which Corot

symbolized with wood nymphs dancing in the dawn, or the shepherd piping to the late lingering afternoon? It is the indomitable instinct of buoyant faith, smoking and singing at its work, the same faith which made Abt Vogler sure that his palace of music would abide.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist,  
Not its semblance, but itself. No beauty, nor good, nor power  
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist  
When Eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky —

Are music sent up to God — by the lover and the bard.

Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by and by.

It is exactly because of life's pitiless chance and change, its heartbreaking incompleteness of attainment here and now, that we may be sure, with "lyric mirth and vivacious classical contentment" that the end of our fugitive impressions, the end of our spiritual adventure, is not yet.



## XXI

### MAURICE PRENDERGAST

(1924)

THE death of Maurice Prendergast marks the passing of one of the most sincere and unaffected men and one of the most subtle and original artists of our time. He did not have what is known in studios as "the photographic eye." Consequently he was ridiculed by those unenlightened critics who require a painstaking imitation of Nature. Nor was he any more popular with those who claim that art has nothing to do with life, that the end of art is the abstract use of æsthetic raw materials for their own sake. His was the soul of the true artist, delighting in life, seeing it in his own way, believing that an artist's special agency is to communicate a life-enhancing pleasure by speaking to the senses and to the spirit in the same language. Prendergast proved that it is possible to be abstract in style and at the same time intimate in self-revelation.

For forty years, in spite of the misunderstanding and neglect of the world, even of his own often intolerant world of professional artists and art critics, this cheerful, confident, courageous man, simple and wholesome in his ways, gentle and kindly in every thought and word and act, has painted according to his heart's desire and to his mind's persuasion. He

was so much of a purist in regard to the fusion or synthesis of the decorative and representative functions of his art of painting that he persisted in reducing his observations of the visible world and his joyous emotions in the presence of Nature, to a simple but beautifully organized pictorial pattern. He had a very definite something to say about life, but he never compromised with his faith by saying it in any other way than the painter's way, the way of form and colour. He left to his pictorial language — particularly to his wise, balanced, and bewitching colour — the pleasant function of making his own intentions and emotions clear. There never was the slightest taint of propaganda, of allegiance to any school or clique or political organization of painters, in Prendergast's pursuit of his ideal. Although no artist was less concerned than he with pleasing that large part of the public which wants a story-telling picture, or a photographic or a pretty one, nevertheless it is equally true that no artist has been less encumbered than he with æsthetic theories and formulas, and with rebellion against representative painting, riots which have raged around him but left him always detached and disapproving. He knew that for some men realism is the only proper language but that for him decoration — and of a somewhat fantastic kind — was the speech which best expressed what he had to say.

He was born in Boston in 1859, and there was no hereditary indication that he would be an artist. In fact, his parents regarded his taste for colour and for

making little drawings of whatever pleased him with such amused condescension as one reserves for the amiable oddities of one's own children. He was always attracted in thought to France and naturally he went to Paris for his education. Under the interested eye of the instructors at Julien's School he drew conscientiously and cleverly in the life class although he wasted no time drawing from the antique. In his later life he would often tell young painters to spend much of their time observing and drawing from Nature. For eight years he kept it up himself so that finally he came to know the human figure so well, and especially its little unconscious gestures suggesting character, that he was able to draw only the essential lines, catching successfully on paper or canvas swift impressions of crowds in action, by knowing how to express the salient points of individual types. His sketching of actual life, however, and his records of people and places that pleased him were reserved for his vacations. His work days were consciously devoted to drawing and to learning all that his teachers had to teach. The significant part of this story of his beginnings as an artist is that he never regarded all the careful and fastidious drawing of his school days, as anything but training for his mind, his eye, and his hand. He knew that this training would enable him to do as he pleased later on and that doing as he pleased would be in the style of his vacation sketches with their hasty notations in water colour of scenes that had made him gay with their zest and animation. To suggest this movement of figures in park-like places

checkered with sunlight and coloured shadows, he needed to make his pigments vibrant and vivacious with a vitality of their own. He seems, even at the outset of his career, to have been already intent upon the lines which make motion and the contours which make form, and to have discovered for himself that by laying on small spots of colour one over another, allowing the under colours to show through, he could make his tones flicker, his sunlight shift and sparkle and dance, his whole effect vivid and exultant with the actual sensations of his joy in living. Having demonstrated all this to his own satisfaction, he went back to Boston and painted scenes on the Common and on the sea beaches, even as he had done in the Luxembourg Garden, in the Bois de Boulogne, at St. Malo and Nice and Rome and Venice.

American painting is straight-laced in Boston. It reveals the excellence of the Parisian atelier in competent drawing and painting, but timidly stops short of building original structures upon that foundation. To properly brought-up Bostonians and to the conscientious craftsmen of the Boston school Prendergast was utterly incomprehensible — and no wonder. Even when he began to send work to exhibitions in New York, the powers who control these affairs would have none of him. They thought he was a little daft and they laughed at him with just a lurking suspicion of being stodgy and murky-minded themselves, for the man's transparent sincerity and freedom from affectation must have impressed them. It was not until the sensa-

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tional Armory Show of 1913 that the older American painters began to notice all the surprising changes that had been going on in Paris since their day and to realize that they might have been a little hard on men like Prendergast. After all, his style was mild and his shock a pleasant one compared with the awful shock of apparently famous Frenchmen like Matisse and Picasso. The Armory Show will always be important as a landmark in the story of American painting. With characteristic recklessness and inconsistency the American people, who are easily led by the nose in matters of taste and art when the French do the leading, went from one extreme to the other — from the extreme of intolerance for independent artists who were original in mind and method to the extreme of cultivating and actually cherishing creations queer, insincere, decadent. However, the Armory Show was indeed a blessing to artists of the type of Prendergast. The new class of collectors and patrons of art, who took their cue from the magnetic Arthur B. Davies, took stock of American painting in the light of what they had learned from Paris and came to the conclusion that this man Prendergast was a wonderful person, after all, whose quaint and humorous designs and provocative drawing stimulated one's happiest faculties like the nonsense of Lewis Carroll, and who painted from a palette full of colours more subtly related than the colours of any painter in France except possibly Pierre Bonnard. After that the doors of at least some exhibitions were open to him, so that congenial spirits came under his spell and a few collectors



acquired his decorative overmantels. No longer did he need to paint for himself alone.

The paintings of Maurice Prendergast are the pure and perfect expression of the man, and of the blithe and jocund philosophy that made his heart grow younger in exultation as his art grew older in experience and more magical in power. His technique improved steadily as his art came to be more and more his entire existence, until at last, in his sixty-fourth year, sense and spirit were in absolute accord and both attuned to the wayward, merry little rhythms which return so persistently throughout the symphony of human life, relieving it of its otherwise unbearable tension or its equally unbearable monotony. To convey a sense of the joy he felt in the presence of Nature as he watched young people and animals of many funny shapes and colours, playing and idling under the trees in the silvery spring-time, with a laughing breeze rippling the surface of a little bay, and a pretty ship or two spreading white sails, and a white house or two on a neighbouring shore — after all, what more in the way of a subject did he need, this poet? The inexhaustible variations in the Prendergast repetitions of approximately the same themes, beach parties or picnics in the park, were the variations in the man's moods as he concentrated his dream upon this cross-section of life, which he had chosen to make his own province, the realm of his own fancy. Just as Claude Monet delighted in painting over and over his hay ricks, poplars, and cathedrals at different hours of the day, in different seasons

of the year, to exercise his genius for suggesting variations of light and weather, so Prendergast repeated his favourite fantasy, his mid-summer day-dreams, so delightfully inconsequential, with their strange air of being true to fact, true to real domesticated places and people, and yet very like fairy-tale towns, as if mortals had come down for a single happy holiday. Sometimes the landscapes are almost naturalistic. More often they suggest Noah's Ark trees, and the houses and animals of Toyland, that unforgettable country. He lavished upon such themes his genius for infinitely various schemes of colour — each concord of colour-notes producing a tonality as subtle and as sumptuous as orchestral weaving of rare, elfin sounds.

Prendergast was an unprecedented colourist in that the gamut of the colours under his masterly control was apparently boundless. He did not load excessive quantities of pigment, but produced delectable variations of subtle hues. Nor did he obtain these variations at the expense of brilliancy through mixing his tones, but through the interweaving of separate stitches of pure clear colour, laying in his designs in a melody of many colours and finishing them with a harmony of superimposed touches, the undertones and overtones mingling. He organized his colours and marshalled their arrangement, but he did this spontaneously, on the inspiration of the moment. The chosen colours recur in precisely the right places on his pattern, and they are all a happy family with special affinities and inseparable associations. The



PINCIAN HILL (WATER COLOR)

*By Prendergast*





end which he had in view as he apparently improvised so light-heartedly with his mosaics in aquarelle or with his many tubes of perfect pigment on whatever shreds of old canvas happened to be at hand — was to make each decoration a unit of colourful design by making each vividly suggestive little figure in his foreground frieze a functioning part of the complex pattern. This decorative unity is a comparatively simple matter when an artist is content to confine himself to the organization of two or three closely related or effectively contrasted tones; but Prendergast, especially in his latest and best works, achieved a unified tonality which fills our eyes and delights and satisfies our minds and senses with an array of no less than a dozen variously coloured spots which he distributed and balanced with positive assurance and blended in exactly the way that Nature blends the world's many colours in the harmonizing element of air. It is the same old principle of the Luminarists, but applied with the emphasis on fantastic decoration rather than on realistic illusion.

Some of the finest evidences of his genius for colour are to be found on canvases of delicate restraint representing cloudy days. Given such a theme, he painted it in tones of ivory, mauve and pearly green which Corot would have loved. There are only three painters who have dared to use and to triumph over that dangerous colour, green — Corot, Weir, and Prendergast. Their greens are always refined by division with other tones more silvery or more golden and less emphatic. Strong colour notes occur in



Prendergast as accents but never in masses of any degree of density. Thus, whenever he had to do with a profusion of leafage in his tree-tops he was relieved from the necessity of distributing the colour balance of his pattern by the simple expedient of neutralizing the mass of green with ineffably subtle modulation by more tender overtones laid on with artful abandon. In the end, through a patient persistence in this spontaneous but ever watchful improvisation, just the tones were achieved which conveyed successfully the sense of the special sumptuousness of trees in spring or summer or autumn.

“Artful abandon!” I believe I have hit upon words fairly descriptive of his mind and of his method. Artful abandon, of course, means wise, well-trained, and well-controlled instinct. The word instinct must be stressed in writing about this artist. He painted from sheer inspiration, which is, I should say, about three parts instinct to one part intellect. He had no use for theories. He had little patience with formulas, not even with Cézanne’s. Much as we may be tempted to do so, it is misleading to speak of his colour schemes, for no painter was really less schematic than he. The colour schemes are undeniable but they are unpremeditated. Nor was he ever deliberately capricious like so many modern artists. At least the same inspired instinct controlled his capricious impulse which captained his philosophical conception and which made him incapable of producing discord, even when playing with a jolly crowd of dissonant colours. When he painted a sea-green or a sky-blue horse, it was not

to make us laugh nor to illustrate a theory about optical illusions with exaggerated emphasis, but because he needed it exactly thus for his arabesque. A gray or brown horse would not have functioned properly on that particular pattern. As for the world's obsession that objects have fixed colours, it was always incomprehensible to this unworldly artist. He was not poking fun at the human race in general nor at the license clerk in particular when he once answered that young man's question as to the colour of his dog by stating that he was purple and yellow. I am sure the license clerk looked alarmed or angry, but there was no need for his concern or for his indignation. Prendergast was giving his serious and sincere opinion as to the appearance of his own dog, and it was the answer of as great an authority on this question of colour as could be found in all the world.

A complaint that is frequently made about the paintings of Prendergast is that they are all alike. Nothing could be more untrue. A careless observer of a Philistine turn of mind, seeing occasional examples and noting the same "astounding peculiarities" — for instance, "surfaces like tapestries or old samplers" and "crude figures vaguely suggesting human beings though bereft of faces" — might indeed conclude that "Prendergast has but one formula and that a foolish one." As a matter of fact, to the eye trained to detect æsthetic subtleties, no two Prendergast canvases seem alike. This might be evident even to the Philistines if they could see a large collection of the master's works assembled. The resemblance

of many Prendergast canvases to Flemish tapestries is undeniable, but there are equally characteristic works which, in their translucent splendour and their heavy contours, resemble rather leaded Gothic glass, whereas others, in their iridescent or glazed surfaces, suggest mediæval mosaics or enamels, and others have the mat quality of Florentine frescoes. Although the gaieties of Prendergast are usually the very antithesis of the sublime and tragic narratives of the great primitives, yet I possess a canvas by the American fantasist — an improvisation, truly pagan, of course, on the russets, purples and orange tones of autumn orchestrated with the inexpressibly gorgeous peacock blues and greens — which has somehow a grave dignity in the design and spacing of the abstract figures which makes me think of august church decorations of the best periods. The heavenly whites which Prendergast has bestowed upon some of the little figures on this same canvas are worthy to adorn frescoes presenting the most solemn Christian stories. The straw hats of his clerks and shop girls on vacation might be haloes for saints in Paradise. After looking at this Autumn Festival for long and dreamful moments, I confess that I have fallen under a spell and experienced ecstasy more mediæval than modern. Usually the spell of a Prendergast is more like wood winds and violins than cathedral organs and choirs; and when he reminds me of early Italian painting, it is less apt to be of Giotto than of Benozzo, Lippo Lippi, Fouquet and the other illuminators, or perhaps of Pisanello, or

the anonymous Venetian painters of marriage chests, and all the more happy-hearted French and Italian artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, especially of their decorative landscape backgrounds with hedges and flowering arbours, lemon and orange trees, cypresses and umbrella pines. The spirit of romantic comedy which so pleasantly pervaded the work of these more or less primitive poet-painters and these more or less pagan decorators of princely houses is the same spirit which makes the style of Prendergast seem so naïve and quaint in spite of its modern and Parisian logic and sophistication. Logic and sophistication, however, are equally important parts of his equipment as an artist, and to these traits in him we are indebted for the fascinating variations in colour and texture, the wealth of artistic surprises and new sensations which he created for the delight of congenial spirits living and as yet unborn. Some of his most unsympathetic critics refer to him as a clumsy painter, while others call him a mannered stylist. As a matter of fact, he was neither altogether an inspired child nor altogether a sophisticated æsthete, but a compound of these opposite types. The compound in his case was equivalent to genius.

What an impossible task it is to really explain a great artist. We can only testify to what he seems to be and to marvel at the mystery of coördinate mind and hand, whose coördinating agency is that same instinct which we find in the little child and in the maker of emotional works of art. Indeed their point of view



is much the same. They have the same joyous absorption in the game of making a world of their own. The children make a jollier world, the great artist a more personal and permanent world than the real one. It is in their own dream worlds that the great and little dreamers choose to live. They see with fresh eyes. They think with open minds. They make their knowledge serve their instinct. And on facts they build their dreams. They have more knowledge than the little dreamers and they know how to cultivate their faculties and to put their instincts to better uses. But there the difference ends. Unless a man becomes again as a little child he shall not enter the kingdom of art.

It seems a paradox in the life and work of Maurice Prendergast that he combined simplicity of thought and clarity of emotion with his fascinating subtlety of style. Perhaps it is the secret of his greatness that his childlike spirit *is* so perfectly expressed in terms of abstract beauty. On the other hand, his subtleties of artistic creation are all the more significant because they seem to be, as indeed they are, spontaneous and instinctive rather than laboured and theoretical. There is really no paradox about Prendergast at all. The explanation of his thinking like a happy child at play and painting like a very wise and sophisticated virtuoso of the brush is that beauty has always been for him and for his devoted brother and fellow craftsman, Charles Prendergast, about whom separate essays must be written, the one meaning and purpose of life. To art these gallant gentlemen have consecrated their every faculty, their undivided time



and attention. We are reminded of the zeal wherewith the Gothic workers in wood and glass and stone brought to perfection their several contributions to the glories of the cathedrals. Faith in God, for these men, made it possible to believe in the eternity of beauty. The Prendergasts have lived and toiled for beauty with a religious faith in its high destiny. Charles, the imaginative carver of gorgeously enamelled wooden chests, screens, decorative panels, and the charming frames for his brother's canvases, has a curious and fascinating artifice and a naïve fantasy. He is really not an antiquarian but an artist like his brother. Yet he does remind us of archaic beauties from Egypt, Persia, India, and the European middle ages; whereas Maurice, the painter, is less eclectic and more universal. Both men, however, have brought to their special tasks the same loving workmanship which distinguished the artists of the early Christian centuries.

I have always liked to think of them starting out on a sunny spring morning for a day out-of-doors without plan or purpose. Down to the shore might they not have gone and selected a ship for a sail on the sea because they rather liked the colour of its flag? For beauty's sake these brothers have lived the most frugal and abstemious of lives, labouring for the love of it without hope of reward or recognition, and without all but the necessities of material existence. Down in the studio on Washington Square they worked in silence, for the painter became so deaf he could not hear his brother's voice. However, sumptu-

ous beauty and lyric joy pervaded the place and material comforts were unnecessary.

Maurice Prendergast lives on in his art as one of the most sensuous but also one of the most spiritual of artists, enjoying life in a full-blooded way, but never exploiting beauty nor materializing his joy in it by literal anecdote and description. What he did was to suggest *the essence of a painter's joy in a bright world of forms and colours moving and changing under such a dancing, flickering light as shines when our hearts are aware of the rare privilege of just being alive.* Suggestion, never precise statement — that was Prendergast's way. I am reminded of William Blake's philosophical aphorism:

He who bends to himself a joy  
Doth the winged life destroy  
But he who kisses joy as it flies  
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.

Now Prendergast, whose sensuous gaiety seems so different from the mysticism of Blake, probably never thought out his reason for painting Nature as he did without any degree of definition or particularity. But the story of his life is the story of a great conviction, a debonair certainty of what he wanted to say about the holidays of quaint, substantial little people by the seashore, and an equally charming faith in the unique, the unprecedented way whereby, whatever befell, he would say it, over and over, and always with a subtle difference. With humorous and glamorous suggestions he revealed his thought, touching ever so lightly the elusive beauty of life on its iridescent wings.



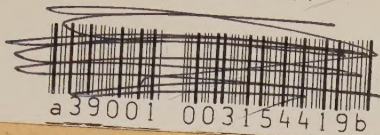
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This is a full-page image of a blank sheet of graph paper. The paper has a light cream or off-white color. It features a uniform grid of thin, dark horizontal and vertical lines. There are approximately 20 horizontal rows and 10 vertical columns. In the bottom-left corner, there is a small, faint circular logo containing a stylized letter 'G'. The overall appearance is that of a standard piece of stationery used for technical drawing or mathematics.



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